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# THE IDES OF MARCH

VOL. I.

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LONDON: HURST & BLACKETT, LIMITED.

# THE IDES OF MARCH

BY

G. M. ROBINS

AUTHOR OF

‘THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE,’ ‘A FALSE POSITION,’ ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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# THE IDES OF MARCH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HIS FATHER.

ABSOLUTE.—Sure, sir, this is not very reasonable, to summon my affections for a lady I know nothing of!

SIR ANTHONY.—I am sure, sir, 'tis more unreasonable in you to object to a lady you know nothing of!

FEVERELL CHASE, in all the comfort and solidity of its compact antiquity, nestled in its obscure position, rather too far below the brow of the hill, as modern sanitation would opine. At the base of its gardens, and clearly discernible from its windows,

flowed the Bourne, a considerable tributary of the Severn.

This morning the waters were flashing and dimpling in all the radiance of a cloudless day; and formed a lovely prospect for the two people seated at the small, sunny breakfast-table in the window of the big hall.

There were four windows along this warm, south side of the hall. Three of them were tall, double lancet shafts, reaching almost to the vaulted ceiling with its fan tracery; and were blazoned with coloured glass coats of arms belonging to all those women who had married into the Westmorland family, so that the morning sunshine flung crimson, purple, emerald, and amber stains upon the black and white paving-stones, and the Indian rugs, and on the backs of the sleepy, basking dogs who were grouped about the floor in various attitudes of bliss. But the fourth window had been

cut down to the ground, so as to open on the terrace without; and the glass was clear, to give a full view of the lovely landscape which stretched away in the distance; and here it was that the present owners of the Chase loved to breakfast, since here they could read their papers in the sun, here there was plenty of room for unlimited dogs, whips, hats, sticks, and other male necessities; and here the butler did not wage war with pipes in the morning, and was prone to wink even at the presence of cigar-ash on the costly mats.

Both the persons now enjoying their trout and muffins, hot coffee, broiled ham and honey, were of the male sex. As a consequence, their breakfast-table was a silent one. One was deep in a newspaper, the other busy with a packet of letters which lay beside his plate. The only sound was the ticking of the great Dutch clock.

The two men were so curiously like each

other, as to leave no doubt of their being father and son. There was the same rather peculiar type of feature, the swarthy skin and black hair contrasting noticeably with the clear eye of Irish grey and the delicate profile ; but the points of difference were quite as striking as those of likeness ; the pair might have been selected as a standing example of the manner in which a man's disposition may work upon and transform his outward appearance.

The face of the younger man was not exactly genial ; the mouth was too serious, the lips too closely folded for that. The eye too, though candid enough, was not sparkling ; there was no impulsiveness, no spontaneity in its expression. Passion was evidently not a leading characteristic, indomitable persistency would more likely be the ruling quality.

In a sense, the father was the handsomer ; his features were better cut, his

eyes larger, his lashes longer, he lacked the air of spruce and compact manliness which his military training had given to Major Westmorland.

There was a certain air of effeminacy about the elder man. His hands were soft, he wore a velvet coat and a terracotta coloured neck-tie with a heavy gold ring. Something of the dilettante without doubt he affected; and there were lines about his forehead which told of the irritability consequent on ill-health.

The Major, on the contrary, had a look of perfect physical soundness. His bronzed skin was clear, his chest broad, his expression tranquil. He was eating a good breakfast with evident appetite, while his father played with the contents of his plate, and threw large morsels to the dogs.

At last it seemed as though the young man's entire absorption in the contents of the post-bag became wearying to his com-

panion. Laying aside the *Times*, he glanced across the table, and remarked,

‘Indian letters, Evelyn, I see.’

‘Yes,’ said the Major, in a preoccupied voice.

‘News evidently not satisfactory,’ said his father, in his incisive, slightly affected tones. ‘The fair Lily not coming to England?’

Evelyn Westmorland barely looked up, and replied indifferently,

‘No, there’s nothing about the Humes. This is from Disney.’

‘Disney?—Disney? Now what was it you were telling me about that young man the other day? Son of the Scotsdale Disneys, isn’t he? I seem to connect his name with something in the nature of a romance.’

‘I told you, probably, that he had had the folly to get engaged to the reigning belle in Colombo, and likewise the honour

of being jilted by her six weeks afterwards, eh?’

‘I believe I recall the facts, and doubtless I expressed my utter contempt,—the contempt I invariably feel—for any man who has not the ability to gain and to keep the affection of any woman he sets his mind upon.’

‘Ah! That’s one of your theories, I know,’ returned his son, a little impatiently. ‘But it’s nonsense, you see, pure nonsense. Very often the mere fact of knowing that a man cares for her is enough to prevent a woman from returning the compliment.’

‘Just so, but that does not touch my point. I still affirm what I affirmed before. The man, in the case you mention, goes to work the wrong way; he should not allow the woman to know he cares for her. Women never value what they are sure of. Before or after marriage, it is

just the same. But I repeat—the man who cannot win the affection of any woman, or retain the entire devotion of his wife, is a contemptible fool.’

‘You should write an essay on marriage, the subject’s fashionable.’

‘One day, perhaps,’ acquiesced Mr. Westmorland, leaning back in his chair with a smile. ‘And who was the Colombo belle who broke Disney’s heart?’

‘A Miss Merrion—girl of good family, I believe. He used to write and rave about her perfect manners, her gentleness, and all that stuff, you know. His letter—the one in which he announced his engagement—was a perfect ecstasy. “The birthday of his life had come,” and all the rest of it. What are you smiling at.’

‘Your phraseology, my son,’ smiled Mr. Westmorland, sipping his coffee. ‘*All that stuff, you know! All the rest of it!* You don’t talk like a man in love.’



‘I am not in love,’ said Evelyn, shortly, ‘as everyone knows but yourself.’

‘Oh, don’t mistake me. I know you are not really in love. You couldn’t be. You are not capable of it. Not one man in a hundred is. But I think you are fond of Lily Hume. I hope you will marry her; and you will get on very well together, and neither of you discover, to the very end of your days, that you have missed the very core and root of life, the precious jewel which lies hid somewhere in this world’s dirty slough, the treasure which, if found, illumines, upholds, atones for all failures, all losses,—love. But love is so much rarer than people think. It can be excellently well counterfeited, but the reality is rare. People think that love is a thing of which all are capable, like hearing, seeing, etc. There are people, as we know, born without sight, or hearing, but they are not nearly so numerous as

those born without the capacity for love.'

'You had certainly better begin that essay I suggested, without delay,' observed his son, wiping his raven black moustache carefully with his serviette, and leaning back in his chair. 'I think the subject's rather fatiguing for breakfast time, myself.'

'I wonder,' said Mr. Westmorland, studying him fixedly—'I wonder how it came about that I should have a son who has no imagination. It is a curious thing. Fate must have resented the passing of the estates to the younger branch of the family, in my person, and revenged herself by making my son as like my elder brother as possible. Poor Charles had no imagination.'

'Your remarks seem to me to be a trifle disconnected,' said the Major, breaking into another egg. 'Must one be ima-

ginnative in order to love? Is that your theory ?'

'Decidedly.'

'I'm inclined to think you are conspicuously wrong,' said Evelyn; 'but there's no need to discuss the point now. For my own part, taking a personal view of the subject, and apart, of course, from your wishes, I can tell you I don't feel like falling in love. I have a thorough contempt for women ! Look at this case ! Here is poor Disney, as good a fellow as ever stepped, completely bowled over by this disgraceful jilt. He can settle to nothing, cares for nothing, finds the world dust and ashes, means to throw up his commission and come home to rot, as he elegantly expresses it. And all for the sake of this girl. I see no reason to consider her an exception to the rule : I believe all women are so, more or less—all attractive women, that is. A woman will

break faith just as often as she has the chance to, in my opinion. If she sticks to one man, it is because she has never been tempted to do otherwise, only that. Fancy pinning one's chances of happiness to that !'

His father pushed back his chair, took up a letter which lay beside his plate, and inserted a penknife into the envelope, carefully cutting the edge.

' I tell you, every man can secure his happiness, if he only knows how to set about it,' he said with conviction. ' Look at me. I was a younger son. I had three hundred a year ; there were two good lives between me and the property ; yet I carried off an heiress from under an earl's nose, and for twenty years she worshipped me, happy if I smiled, dejected when I frowned.'

' My mother was a saint,' burst out his son.

' Oh no, Evelyn, she wasn't ; your mother

was a woman,' gently returned his father, 'and she was a very unruly one when I met her first. But you see, I understood her: I understand all women;' and the widower's countenance broadened into a very satisfied smile. 'For your own sake, I wish you took after me, dear boy,' he said.

Evelyn did not reply. He finished his egg, drank off his coffee, pushed back his chair, and rose.

The dogs promptly rose also.

Major Westmorland went to the open window, and stood looking out, his hands in his pockets.

Seven dogs also went to the window and looked at the view, and, had they possessed hands and pockets, would doubtless have imitated that manœuvre likewise; but in their gentle canine minds they felt that human beings soared to heights they could not follow.

Their master passed out upon the sunny terrace, and strolled slowly to the left. The procession followed. The leader stopped, gazing into the sky for signs of weather. His seven satellites sniffed the air. Larrie, the Skye, was old and fat. He took advantage of the halt to be seated. The other six looked calm disapproval, remaining erect, with stiffened backs, waiting for the next move.

When Evelyn had decided that the present brightness would hold, he returned leisurely to the window and looked in.

‘Here’s an invitation for us both to Hesselburgh,’ said his father, glancing at him over his pince-nez.

‘Oh, is there? I’m not sure I wouldn’t like to go,’ was the reply, in the truly British negative style of expressing a desire.

‘Ah! yes! There is a daughter, is there not? I have not seen her since she was a

child,' said Mr. Westmorland, lifting his cold fine grey eyes to his son. 'She would be a good match now.'

There was a curious intentness in the scrutiny he bent upon the young man; but Evelyn declined to see it

'Lilly Hume and Muriel Saxon: I could hardly marry both,' he said, with an air of wishing to turn the subject lightly aside, and an ill-assured smile.

'I tell you what it is, sir,' returned his father slowly, with a gradual hardening of features and a complete change of voice and manner. 'It seems to me that there has been enough of this fooling. You are running it too fine. You have only this autumn in which to settle yourself.'

Major Westmorland stood stock-still, his dark face expressing an extreme distaste of the turn the conversation had taken.

'Let us talk of something else,' he said.

A red spot glowed in the elder man's cheek.

‘Will you never believe that I am in earnest?’ he said, in a voice shaking with passion.

The Major's shrug of the shoulders was divided between annoyance and contempt.

‘If I could think you in earnest, I should have to lower my idea of your mental powers considerably,’ he said drily.

His father's eyes gleamed with a cold, steely light ; his calm was more formidable than violence.

‘You do me the honour to despise me, because I am fool enough to accept as valid a testimony whose genuineness, I will undertake to say, is more conclusively proved than anything in the Old and New Testament. A fool ! The folly, sir, rests with those who, in their insolent presumption, reject the warnings sent to them. We are so scientific now-a-days, forsooth.



We accept nothing that we cannot prove—anything that sounds unlikely is impossible; yet look how Fate has worked to bring about this remarkable coincidence—how this old prophecy speaks across the centuries, describing you, describing me, describing the very movements of the stars! Evelyn!’ he rose, trembling, and laid an iron grip on his son’s muscular arm. ‘Evelyn, when you put on that look of civil obstinacy, *I hate you!* Confound you, sir, you are like your mother! But I tamed her,’ the Major started convulsively, ‘and by —, I’ll tame you! I say I will! If you refuse to gratify me in this, the one only request I have ever made to you, I swear I’ll disinherit you! Do you understand?’

‘No threats are likely to convince me, father,’ said his son with dignity. ‘You ought to know that. Sit down now, let us talk this matter quietly over, for the hundredth time. It has been so long in abey-

ance now, that I thought—I hoped—the delusion had worn itself out. But it seems,’ wistfully, ‘that it’s as strong as ever?’

The elder man took off his pince-nez, and began to polish them with a shaking hand, his eyes fixed on vacancy. His moment of anger seemed to have temporarily added ten years to his age, his cheeks looked hollow, his jaw dropped.

‘Yes,’ he said, nervously, ‘of course it is as strong as ever! The time has come to talk plainly, once and for all. What I ask you to do is so simple, that you can be actuated by nothing but pure perversity in refusing me. Marry before the 1st of March next, and bring home your wife. Why, it seemed such an obvious thing. I have never insisted upon it! I thought the surest way of securing what I wanted was to let you alone. I determined that I would not, like so many fools, defeat my own purpose by insisting too

strongly upon it. Every man who can afford it, marries before he comes to your age. I have always let you know I would make you a sufficient allowance. It is nothing in the world but sheer perversity that makes you decline.'

Evelyn's face had a weary, patient look, as of one who has been forced many times to go over the same distasteful ground.

The starting veins in his father's forehead, the restless eye, the feverish aspect, suggested vividly enough the nature of the Westmorland family skeleton. He was a different being, utterly transformed from the handsome, lazy, elderly cynic, who had discussed the marriage question with his son over the breakfast-table.

'Come, stroll in the garden,' said the son, soothingly, passing an arm through his. 'Let us have a weed on the lawn, and talk this fairly out. There must be more in it. This old saw, this relic of

mediæval superstition, is not enough to upset a man of your talent. A piece of rhyming jingle could hardly be of force to impress your mind so profoundly. Shake it off, sir. It embitters your life.'

'Embitters my life? You are right there. It does—it does,' said Mr. Westmorland, shivering. 'I will put it only on that ground, if you choose. Consider the whole thing a delusion, if you must. But grant that my life is really embittered by your refusal to do so simple a thing as this I demand. Will you really still be obstinate?'

He sighed heavily as he stepped out into the garden.

Evelyn walked to one of the untidy tables, and took up the cloth cap which lay there among the whips and sticks.

The phalanx of dogs had, during the foregoing discussion, hung about in disconsolate uncertainty, wondering how the

situation would develop itself. Now they set up a glad howl of delight, and with no further ceremony rushed violently out of doors in a body, rolling over and over, yapping and playing, rioting in the exhilarating fragrance of the morning air. In the distance the misty woods which flanked the dancing river were in the meridian of their leafy splendours. Nearby, the dew lay on the berberis and on the gorgeous geraniums and roses of the garden, the sun was drawing up the sweetness from the beds of mignonette. The scene was as soul-satisfying as an English summer knows how to be.

‘So the 1st of March next is the fatal date?’ said Evelyn, as he came forth, lighting his cigar.

‘The 1st of March,’ said his father, mechanically, gazing before him with a fixed air.

‘The Ides of March! It should be a

fortnight later,' laughed the Major, dropping his fusee and extinguishing it with his foot as he turned with a look of bored politeness to his companion.

## CHAPTER II.

## A GENERAL PRACTITIONER.

Pelting glee, as frank as rain  
On cherry-blossoms.

E. B. BROWNING.

‘My dear boy ! I was on the point of bringing you up your breakfast in bed. Poor thing ! You *do* look sleepy ! You were up all night, were you not ?’

‘Superintending the arrival of Mrs. Jessop’s twins,’ solemnly replied the doctor, as he sat down to the table and lifted the cover of the bacon dish.

The slim, impetuous girl who leaned against his chair gave a sympathetic moan.

‘Oh, poor Dick!’ she lamented, ‘poor Mrs. Jessop! Poor twins! I really haven’t pity enough to go on any further, or I would add, poor *Mr.* Jessop!’

‘I don’t think the twins want pitying,’ said Dick, applying himself vigorously to the loaf. ‘They are both stout, well-to-do young people, of the male persuasion, and it’s a jolly time of year for them to get acclimatized. Pour out my coffee, Leo.’

The girl turned away to her place at the head of the little round table, sank into a chair, and complied with her brother’s request.

‘What does Mr. Jessop say?’ she asked, after a pause.

‘Oh, he’s rather pleased than otherwise. You see the other four are all girls. Twin boys are a novelty, and novelty is dear to the human heart. Throw me another lump of sugar, Leo.’

‘My housekeeping will exceed my week-



ly allowance, if you consume sugar at this rate, Richard,' said Miss Forde, severely.

'I expect so. Where's the paper, you young humbug?'

'I am sitting on it,' pleadingly.

'Then, however unwillingly, I'm afraid I must trouble you to rise.'

'No, Dick, *dear*,' persuasively, 'don't read the paper yet. There's a letter for you,' producing one mysteriously from under the tea-cosy. 'It *is* such a nice one, and I do so want you to read it.'

'How do you know it's a nice one, you naughty, inquisitive little girl?'

'Only by the look! It is a rough, thick, square envelope, bluey grey. On it is printed "Feverell Chase, Barnisham." It looks as if it *might* be an invitation.'

'Barnisham? It's from Westmorland! Give it up at once.'

'Barnisham is *not* in Westmorland, Dick.'

‘ Who said it was ? It’s the man’s name. Hand it over, darling.’

Leo reluctantly relinquished her ‘ bluey grey ’ treasure, and remained, with elbows on the table, and frank chin supported in two pink hands, gazing straight at her brother in breathless interest, as he broke the seal of his letter and began to read eagerly.

‘ If it *is* an invitation, I wonder if it will include me,’ sighed she. ‘ Everybody hereabouts knows that the doctor’s sister has come to live with him ; but Barnisham is nowhere *near* here. Feverell Chase ! How nice it sounds !’

She gave an eager, impatient twist to the whole of her slim, long frame. Leo Forde was nineteen, with everyone of life’s possibilities before her. It was enchanting to find herself mistress of the doctor’s unpretentious abode in the Cathedral town of Norchester. True, the neighbourhood was

deadly dull, quite conspicuously without any charms of a social kind. But the tea-parties and tennis-parties, with their undue preponderance of hersex, and the subduing, chastening influence of the presence of the Minster clergy, were so many feasts of the gods, absolute saturnalia to Leo; who emerged from a nursery full of youthful cousins in a remote vicarage, the glad time having arrived when Dick, her darling Dick, her idol, the brother more than ten years older than herself, should be able to make a home for her.

Richard Forde was a man of more than average ability. He had been temporarily employed as doctor to a regiment whose own doctor was disabled, and in that capacity had so pleased the colonel that he received from him an introduction to the old doctor who had physicked most of Norchester for nearly fifty years, and was at last convinced that he must resign his

practice. Richard became nominally his partner, virtually his successor, and at once sent for his little sister from the rustic seclusion of the vicarage school-room, to share his home as long as she cared to do so.

Mrs. Roper, his aunt, prophesied misfortune for this arrangement. She did not like to lose Leo, for two reasons: First, the Ropers were poor, and would miss the allowance made them for her maintenance; secondly, the girl had been unspeakably useful, her sweet temper and her quick wits making her both an able and a willing aide-de-camp to the harassed vicar's wife, with a large family and a large parish on her hands.

To the girl, the new life was like fairy-land. She was as happy as the day was long, she went about in her plain frocks and linen shirts, from lawn to lawn, tennis racquet in hand, and already the young ladies of Norchester were beginning to

feel annoyed at the admiration she excited in this simple attire.

‘My dear, how nice you look,’ many a kind-hearted host or hostess would say, as Leo walked fearlessly in, her complexion fair as a June rose, her dark dewy eyes sparkling with expected pleasure, her brown hair all fluffy, under its neat hat with fresh band of spotless ribbon.

It takes but little to adorn youth and happiness. Leo’s untrimmed skirts and clean cottons would scarcely have harmonized with anything less young and blooming.

Her brother daily marvelled at the untold difference which the introduction of this ‘little chit’ made in his life. A companion who invariably sees the funny side of everything is a boon the greatness of which is apt to be undervalued.

If Dick had been, perforce, absent from one of the garden-parties, Leo’s account of

it, when she returned, was better than to have been there himself. He was rather a silent man, but keenly appreciative. Leo kept him amused from the time her great eyes unclosed themselves in the sunny summer mornings, to the time when, like a tall, drooping poppy, she yawned herself, heavy-lidded, to bed.

‘I had not been there five minutes,’ she would say, her recital rendered vivid by the laughing eye, the expressive hand, the evident relish of the trivial incident, ‘not five minutes before I saw Mrs. Hancock’s sprigged foulard walking up the path, with Mrs. Hancock panting inside it. “There’s Miss Forde!” she gasped, as I knew she would. “Come and shake hands, my dear. What’s your Christian name?” Now, Dick, you know it *is* a little fatiguing, dear. This was the ninth time she had asked me that. I felt so tempted to invent a new one and call myself Jemima,

just for *once*, to see what she would say. However, I'm so truthful by nature that out it came. "Leo" I said sweetly. "Leo! That's a boy's name!" Stereotyped objection! "It must be Leonora!" "No, I assure you my full name is Leone!" "Leone! There is no such name. It's Leonora, you may be sure. Your father and mother would never have given you such an extraordinary name as Leone!" "I am sure they would not, had they known how it would distress you, Mrs. Hancock."

'Leo, you never said that!'

'But indeed I did! She goaded me up so! She looked at me so vindictively. There was a fat man with a beard behind her, I believe he is her son, and that she meant to introduce me, but she refrained, to punish me, and swept on, and divided him between Etta Nash and the two Miss Petties. Wasn't it tragic? I was left to mourn in a

corner for nearly five minutes, when Captain Rider came up and asked me to play, and I drowned my disappointment in three splendid sets, in two of which we beat the Precentor and Georgie Glynn. The fat man cast some longing looks in our direction, but he was helpless, for he was got up in his Sunday best, and I don't think he knows one end of a racquet from the other !'

Recitals, such as this, amused Richard greatly. He was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Hancock, and the sprigged foulard, and was glad that his Leo did not elect to be patronized by her. He did not reflect that the girl's acute sense of humour might be dangerous in a place where everyone took everything seriously.

Nobody in Norchester, except Leo herself, found Mrs. Hancock at all laughable.

Richard had perused and re-perused his 'bluey-grey' letter with knitted brows,



that betokened rather puzzled thoughtfulness. His sister grew more and more impatient.

‘Oh, Dick,’ she burst out at last, in uncontrollable eagerness. ‘*Do* tell me! You are just keeping quiet on purpose to tease me! *Is* it an invitation?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Dick, drily, ‘it’s an invitation, certainly.’

‘For what? For whom? For me?’ she cried.

‘For himself, to lunch here to-day,’ said the doctor, replacing the letter in its envelope.

‘Is that all?’

How inadequate are words to render the absolute blankness of Miss Forde’s tones!

‘Who is he?’ she presently asked, after an interval, during which she armed herself with fortitude.

‘He is Major Westmorland. He was in

Colonel Barff's regiment; and he's staying at Hesselburgh.'

'Staying at Hesselburgh! With the Saxons?'

'So he says.'

Here was food for much thought. The Saxons had just come down in their might from London, for the summer season, at their country house. Mrs. Saxon belonged to the great plutocracy of to-day: she was the presiding genius. Sole daughter and heiress of Melliship, the well-known provision merchant, she had married, nobody quite knew why, Mr. Saxon, an amiable and harmless little gentleman of good family. It could scarcely have been *faute de mieux*, for Mrs. Saxon, spite of personal disadvantages, had a fortune which could have easily secured her a very creditable position in the peerage. Perhaps she recognised, in his peculiarly malleable temperament, the one indis-

pensable requisite for her happiness. It was always 'Mrs. Saxon and her husband were there.' She was a large, stout woman, with a heavy jaw, and red hair, which she wore cropped as short as a boy's.

It was rumoured that she was to remain all the autumn at Hesselburgh this year, as she was burning to introduce the sleepy Cathedral town to some of the modern applications of hygienic science. In fact, the mystic word Demography had been whispered in Norchester. Mr. Saxon had to follow his leader through many strange paths, for Mrs. Saxon was an inveterate hobby-horse rider. Whether it was Hygiene, Female Suffrage, Massage, Home Rule, or the Housing of the Poor, whether Mrs. Saxon deemed it necessary to lay foundation-stones, go to a gymnasium, or support some sister enthusiast on a public platform—there likewise was to be found the

ever-patient Mr. Saxon, with his double eye-glass and his unfailing sweet-temper. He was a good-hearted little man, and there seemed no cause to believe that he was unhappy, though those of Norchester society, who were not invited to Hesselburgh, gave it as their opinion that the Saxon idea of matrimony was not theirs, thank heaven !

On the other hand, those admitted to any sort of intimacy at Hesselburgh, while frankly avowing the eccentricities of its ruler, still held her to be a woman of exceptional ability, who could scarcely be expected to move quietly along the beaten track prescribed for her by conventionality. Anyway, be her vagaries what they might, nobody could deny that she was a good wife and mother ; that the poor on her estates were excellently cared for, or that she was regular in her place in the Minster on Sunday mornings, especially when the

eloquent, if somewhat unorthodox, bishop happened to be preaching.

Leo Forde had beheld her last Sunday morning with much interest, as she marched in, arrayed in a billy-cock hat and tailor-made light cloth gown, no mantle of any sort shrouding her big, uncompromising proportions, and her red hair cut shorter than her husband's mouse-coloured locks.

She was followed by her pretty daughter Muriel, quite unlike her mother in every detail, by the ever-faithful partner of her progresses, and by a tall boy of nineteen, her son, whose appearance most favourably impressed the doctor's little sister.

Spite of the oddity of at least one member of the family, she thought she would like to know the Saxons. They seemed unlike the rest of the Norchester community—they looked as though they had some 'go' in them.

For this reason, the thought of receiving

their guest, Major Westmorland, to lunch, caused her some trepidation. She was already mentally selecting her *menu*, when Dick, the letter in his hand, left the room in a pre-occupied sort of way, and made for his little surgery. He had not offered to show his correspondence to his sister, so she wisely concluded that it was 'about business,' and, ringing the bell, prepared to consult her cook as to the resources of the larder.

In the surgery, Dick Forde sat down by the table, took out his letter and read it carefully through again.

It ran thus :

'Feverell Chase,  
August 2nd.

'DEAR FORDE,

'I am a good deal disturbed, and in the midst of my disquietude I have remembered, with a ray of hope,

that your new practice is at Norchester, not five miles from Hesselburgh, where my father and I are just going to stay some weeks with the Saxons. I wonder if you remember a great discussion down at Woolford, at the officer's mess, about mania, and that I told you that my father was the victim of a most curious form of monomania?

‘In case you do not remember, as is doubtless most probable, I will tell you again what I told you then. I am afraid I shall have to bore you with a short *resumé* of family history, in order to make my meaning clear. With which object, I shall leave my father to drive up from the station to Hesselburgh alone, and waylay you—it will be about lunch-time—to pour out my troubles, if you can listen to them then ; if not, to make an appointment for some day in the near future. If you are obliged to be out, leave a line for

me, will you? And so make me still more  
than at present,

‘Sincerely yours,

‘EVELYN C. WESTMORLAND.’



## CHAPTER III.

## HOPE.

We live by admiration, hope, and love!

*The Excursion.*

THAT same morning, while still Dr. Forde was slumbering in his bed, and Leo herself only just thinking of turning out; while the lovely country side was still swathed in a pearly mist, with the sunshine sparkling through, and all the pastures were drenched with a copious dew, two mysterious forms were to be seen, creeping with baskets through the silent park at Hesselburgh, eyes fixed upon the wet

grass as though searching for hidden treasure.

A youth and a maiden.

The youth was a lank specimen of his kind—long, thin, dark, and humorously plain, though a fund of good spirits sparkled in his brown eyes, which atoned for many deficiencies. He wore gaiters, to protect his feet and ankles from being saturated in the long rank grass, and his expression, as he walked at his companion's side, was that of one thoroughly enjoying himself. The maiden wore a stout covert coat over her serge gown, and a little straw boating hat set on her brown hair. Her skirts were looped up as high as decency could possibly permit, and her shapely ankles were cased in high, well-laced boots.

Her face can only be described as one which, if glanced at for a moment, perforce made you turn and look again.

Warm brown hair with a ripple in it,

clear hazel eyes, a fair and delicate skin deepening into a soft carnation on the smooth cheeks, a nondescript nose, short, even teeth, and a figure neither tall nor short, and erring on the side of slenderness—these are the property of many and many an English girl.

This particular one possessed something more. A certain sedateness of expression, at once sweet and baffling, assailed the curious with a vehement desire to know what her character was. Instinctively people turned aside to notice her, and talk to her; with this astonishing result, they discovered by slow degrees that the demure girl with the sphinx-like expression had found out already a great deal more of them than they had of her.

She was, or seemed to be, inscrutable.

Just now, however, the natural reserve was as much laid aside as possible; she was yielding herself up to the unconventional

delights of the moment, to the seductions of wet grass, thick boots, and a solitary park at half-past six o'clock in the morning.

‘Tom! oh, Tom!’ she cried, rapturously, ‘Here they are at last! A perfect settlement of them, such beauties! Do be quick!’

Tom Saxon, who had turned unwisely aside after glimmering white dots, which turned out to be puff-balls, now swooped with a shout on the girl’s treasure-trove. Unmistakable mushrooms these, freshly sprung, firm, fleshy, and embrowned like a lightly-baked biscuit at the top, with the dew upon them, and the fresh earthy fragrance clinging to them, and to their captor’s pink fingers as she laid them delicately in her basket.

‘Oh, Tom, are they not good ones? Don’t they make you feel quite hungry for breakfast?’

‘Rather! If we go on at this rate we shall be in plenty of time to get them cooked for breakfast. And we’ll tell cook to stew them in cream. I say, Hope! let’s have tea in the kitchen again to-night. And have another bird cooked in mushrooms! Muriel will, like a shot. She’s game to *eat* the mushrooms, though she won’t take the trouble to get them for herself.’

‘Trouble! Fancy calling this trouble!’ said Hope, as she rose from her crouching posture, and faced the sunrise with a half-smile lingering in her dreamy eyes. ‘Tom, I do wish you were poetical.’

‘So do I, my dear, I’m sure, if it would give you the smallest pleasure. But you see I’m not.’

‘No, you are not,’ she acquiesced, with a reluctant sigh. ‘However, you are a very nice boy as you are, so I won’t repine.’

‘What’s the good of spouting a lot of

rot?' blurted Tom, somewhat spasmodically, the upper part of his body being stretched over a ditch, and his face reddened with his exertions. Here's a ripping good morning and a first-class sunrise, and these mushrooms take the cake, I'm blessed if they don't! Look at that one. Here am I, out in the park, with the jolliest girl in England, and such a rousing dew on, that I shall tell them to roll the tennis-lawn before breakfast. I don't want any poet to express my feelings, thank you! Nobody could do it neater than I've done.'

'Oh, Tom!' cried Hope, sorrowfully shaking her head at him. 'Oh, Tom, does *no* upbraiding voice within you cry "For shame!" You that learned Shakespeare in your cradle. You who have studied *Paradise Lost* as a holiday task! You whose mother reared you in a perfect hot-house of literature——'

‘Just so. That’s precisely why, said Tom, composedly, regaining his balance, and straightening himself, basket in hand. ‘I might have taken to it later if the good old *mater* hadn’t put it into me with a spoon. It’s the same with everything. You take a boy twice a day to church regularly, and see if he ever wants to go inside a church again when he’s grown up. It’s the nature of the animal. When I’m talking to the *mater* I put it better. I say it’s the natural reaction of humanity, asserting its power of freewill against the animal instinct of imitation. I think,’ said Tom, with pardonable pride, ‘that that sounds rather well, don’t you, duckie?’

‘Very,’ murmured Hope, reflectively. ‘Quite like Herbert Spencer : or is it *unlike* him ? I’m not quite sure ; but I know he says you ought to let children alone, doesn’t he?’

‘Never mind him. Let’s have tea in

the kitchen,' said Tom, persuasively. 'Here's a jolly, long lovely summer's day before us. Let's play tennis after breakfast, be lazy after lunch, have tea and mushrooms at four, and then go for a good long ride. Eh? Shan't we?'

'Oh Tom, you forget!' said Hope, with a sudden unpleasant recollection. 'Are there not visitors coming to-day?'

'By Jove! So there are! The Westmorlands, *père et fils*! French, do you observe? Just thrown in to show my culture. Oh, blow the Westmorlands! They will cut up the whole day! They will have to be met. Oh, well, *pater* can do that,—can't he?'

'Are they nice—the Westmorlands?' asked Hope, a little doubtfully, as she re-arranged her spoils in her full basket.

'Westmorland *père* is a great bore, in my humble opinion; but the *mater* and he are tremendous chums. She never buys



a picture without consulting him ; and he presents her with copies of his poems, bound in white vellum and printed for private circulation only. The worst of it is, they will stay such a time, as I know the *mater* has invited him specially to help her in her plans for this blooming Sanitary League. He's an old humbug, that's what he is. I don't think the Major has a very good time of it, myself. They had me down to Feverell Chase for a week's shooting last year, and I can tell you I wouldn't be in his shoes. The old boy is always snubbing him. And he talks so queerly too, about will-power and occult forces and telegraphy, and psychology. He takes the *mater*, when we are in town, to séances and things. I think he's a bit cracked, myself.'

'Is Major Westmorland patient with him?' asked the girl thoughtfully.

'Wonderfully, as I think. He's not a

bad sort, only a little heavy. Not up to much fun. I wish they weren't coming, for my part. You won't let the old boy monopolize you, will you, dear?'

'Will he want to?'

'Oh yes, won't he? I know him. He makes love to every girl he meets on the Major's behalf. It's such fun, because you know the Major doesn't see it. He's the sort of fellow that won't marry.'

'I suppose, as he is the only son, his father is anxious for him to do so?'

'I suppose so. He'd much better let it alone, or else it will be like what we were just now talking of—he won't marry, out of sheer perverseness.'

'That would be tragic,' laughed Hope, lightly. 'Oh, Tom, there's the stable clock chiming eight, and I must change all my things before breakfast! We must run!'

The sleepy chimes of the great clock died away on the hazy air, and through

the stillness boomed out the heavy strokes of the distant Minster bell.

A nameless, causeless, depression had suddenly assailed Hope. The morning was fair as ever, the mushrooming expedition had been most successful, and a long summer's day was before her. Why should she feel sad? Why should she find herself strenuously wishing that no guests were to arrive at Hesselburgh that day?

If only she and Tom and Muriel could continue the placid, childish, unruffled existence of this past week. She had been able entirely to forget that she was nearing the mature age of three-and-twenty, that she had seen much society and been half round the world; that joy and disappointment, pain and pleasure of a keen sort had been hers. This wholesome English country life, this natural unspoilt English boy, with his queer, outspoken worship of

her and his vivid interest in such rustic joys as mushrooming, or tea in the kitchen, were making her young and unsophisticated again, she told herself.

It was pleasant—refreshing—nice! How nice! Now something was going to break in upon it unpleasantly, she dimly felt. An alien presence was to be introduced. If Major Westmorland were anything approaching young, Muriel and Tom and she could scarcely exclude him from their plans; but she felt that the presence of an outsider—a man—not a boy like Tom, but a society man, would chill, repress, subdue. It was a saddening thought, and it just dashed the exhilaration of that dewy ramble, that sumptuous sunrise, these satisfactory spoils.

Tom was in such jubilant spirits that he forgot to notice her sudden silence. The arrival of twenty Westmorland families could not depress him. He had duly

warned Hope against the father, he certainly feared no interference from the son. He was in tip-top form, as he announced to his mother, dancing in to breakfast with a most formidable appetite.

Mrs. Saxon, in a white cotton gown, was seated already at the table, with a book at her side, eating her breakfast calmly, and reading at the same time. Her short red hair was brushed back sprucely from her large, bony brow, as high as that of a mediæval Flemish madonna. She looked, as a friend of hers once remarked, aggressively clean. She appeared to have more than washed—to have *scoured* herself all over. One felt as if she had used the garden rake, and the irritation caused by this treatment had not yet subsided. She heartily returned Tom's hearty kiss, and avowed that she had still a corner left for the mushrooms, which presently arrived, hot and savoury, from the kitchen. Mr.

Saxon, at his end of the table, smiled, and greeted his son with the unfailing amiability with which he greeted everybody.

Hope speedily appeared, metamorphosed completely as to costume, and quite restored as to her spirits.

‘Muriel last as usual,’ said the hostess, good-humouredly.

‘I’ve a great mind to go and cold-pig her, lazy little beggar!’ cried Tom, indignantly. ‘Why, Hope and I have been up for hours! Fancy wasting a day like this!’

‘I wonder if you would do something for me to-day, Tom,’ requested his mother. ‘I want you to take the dog-cart into Norchester for some things I must have; I can’t well send the men, as the brougham must go to the station to meet the Westmorlands, who will be here to lunch.’

Tom’s face fell. His planned tennis

morning vanished into thin air. He was far too sweet-tempered, however, to demur.

‘I’ll go,’ he announced, heroically, ‘if Hope will go too.’

‘Of course I will. I like going in the cart—you know I do,’ said Hope.

‘You might meet the 12.53 as you come back,’ suggested Mrs. Saxon. ‘I am going down in the brougham, and the Major would probably rather drive up in the cart than make a third with his father and me. We are sure to talk as if we were at a W. S. L. committee meeting, for Mr. Westmorland is coming especially to help me in the arrangements for the Health Fête.’

‘Blow the Major,’ said Tom irreverently.

‘Don’t be foolish, my dear boy,’ returned his mother calmly.

‘Well, he won’t be much in our way,

Hope: he can sit behind with Muriel, can't he?'

'Oh, can he? That depends on who "he" may be,' said the calm voice of Muriel herself, as she sauntered in to breakfast.

'Major Westmorland. He's coming to-day, worse luck to him!' grumbled Tom.

'Why, I always thought you liked him,' said Muriel in some surprise, as she seated herself at the table.

She was decidedly pretty, this Muriel, tall and fair, and rather languid in her movements, always faultlessly dressed, invariably too late for everything, but never ruffled by any amount of banter or remonstrance.

'I am sure you used to like the Major very much,' she said, in a soft, high-pitched, drawling voice, which was characteristic of her.



‘Well, his father’s an old bore, anyhow,’ said Tom crossly.

‘I quite agree with you there,’ said Muriel serenely, helping herself to butter, her heavy white lids almost eclipsing her soft eyes. ‘I think anybody but *mater* would find old Mr. Westmorland a bore. He is always talking about German, or classical music, or Browning, or Hygiene, or something else equally disagreeable.’

Poor Mrs. Saxon! Here was her reward for the unheard-of sums lavished on the education of her son and daughter. As Tom said, it had been put into them with a spoon. There was some truth in his theory of reaction.

The *mater* took the candid criticisms of her family in very good part. Evidently the right of private judgment was freely conceded at Hesselburgh. She merely observed, as she gathered up her letters and rose from the breakfast-

table, that they had better practise resignation, as the visitors would most certainly stay for a month, and that the dog-cart would be round by eleven.

## CHAPTER IV.

## LEO AS HOSTESS.

The primrose by the river's brim,  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more!

PETER BELL.

MAJOR WESTMORLAND, as he came out of the station, a goodly array of his father's impedimenta on his arm, was half dazzled by the flood of brilliant sunlight which poured over the scene. Looking about, he soon perceived the Saxon brougham, with its neat liveries and sleek horses; and proceeded, with the aid of the footman, to stow his packages within it. His father

was still on the platform, shaking hands with his hostess, an operation never to be got over in less than five minutes.

‘Hi!’ shouted someone close by. The Major looked up involuntarily, with knitted brows and dazzled eyes.

‘Hi!’ came the cry again, accompanied by a lively chirrup. ‘Hi, Major! Look alive!’

‘It’s Mr. Thomas, sir, and the young ladies in the cart,’ explained the footman; and Evelyn, shading his eyes with his hand, became aware of the close proximity of the graceful cart, its varnished wheels flashing in the sun; of a restless mare dancing up and down, in her nervous dread of the puffing engine, only divided from her by a wooden rail; and of the faces of three young people all turned towards him, with expressions of varying interest.

It struck even the pre-occupied, unim-

pressionable Major at first glance, what a brilliant trio they were. Tom's plainness was more than atoned for by his spirit and gracefulness; and both the girls, young, pretty, becomingly dressed, their dainty parasols just fluttering in the morning air, were a pleasing example of English country life in summer-time, at its very best.

Youth, promise, and enjoyment! It was a charming picture. He made his way up to them, raising his hat indefinitely to both girls, being somewhat exercised in his mind as to which was Miss Saxon. Muriel relieved him of his doubts, by leaning forward and greeting him in her peaceful treble drawl.

'How do you do? Have you had a comfortable journey? Was not it very hot in the train? I should think it must have been.'

'Awful!' he answered briefly, with a

short laugh, which Hope thought sounded rather pleasant.

‘We thought you might prefer driving up with us to going in the brougham with *mater* and all the parcels,’ went on Miss Saxon.

‘Thanks very much——’

‘And we’ve got no end of sweets, so I advise you to come,’ cut in Tom, cheerfully. ‘Not half a bad tuck-shop in the Market Place. I say, Muriel, introduce Hope, hadn’t you better?’

‘Major Westmorland, may I introduce you to my friend Miss ——’

The mare jumped, the wheels grated on the gravel, and the name did not reach the gentleman’s ears. He bowed in acknowledgment, and for a moment met Hope’s unruffled gaze, as she calmly looked down from her superior height. She gave him a little smile, and said, rather pleadingly,

‘I will be so grateful if you will straight-

way jump in, Major Westmorland, it makes me so nervous when Maidenhair dances about like this.'

He was obliged to explain, rather lamely, that he was not coming straight up to the house, he was due to lunch with a friend of his, whom he had to consult on a matter of business. He almost felt as if he did not wish to get up and drive with these three jovial creatures, who ate sweets and 'chaffed' and amused themselves so gaily. He was not in a vein for mirth of this kind, his mind was full of a settled grievance, which he hoped to have the relief of pouring into a sympathizing ear shortly. But he was not so easily to be rid of the dog-cart and its mirthful occupants.

'Who's your friend, and where does he hang out?' demanded Tom, with the Saxon ready good-humour. 'Hop in and we'll drive you there——'

‘It will be so much out of your way, Saxon——’

‘So much the better. Just look at Maidenhair! She’s full of corn and wants taking down a peg. Where shall I drive?’

The Major resigned himself to the inevitable, with a look of evident distaste, which tickled Hope amazingly. He took his seat behind, by Muriel’s side, and turned to his charioteer.

‘It’s Dr. Forde, in Minster-gate,’ he said, mournfully.

‘Oh ho! Dr. Forde in Minster-gate!’ cried the irrepressible Tom, in tones of much—far too much—meaning. ‘No wonder you are so anxious to call there, Major—no wonder! Well, look here! I’ll make a bargain. If I drive you there to-day will you take me to call and introduce me first chance you get? Eh? Isn’t that fair?’



‘Tom, how vulgar you are,’ said Muriel, unemotionally.

‘Not a bit of it ; you know quite well that, not counting Hope, there’s not a girl in Norchester who comes anywhere near Miss Forde. I saw her last Sunday in the cathedral. Give her my love, Major, won’t you ?’

No reply was vouchsafed to this broad, schoolboy chaff ; evidently Major Westmorland did not by any means relish it. They were off now, shooting over the long bridge, across the wide, shallow, vociferous river, washing against the stone piers. Then onwards, along the irregular main street, the low, grey towers of the Minster now visible, now hidden, by intervening buildings.

Through the wide market-place ; empty to-day, except of the immemorial market-cross in the centre ; past the town-hall, club and reading-room, through the win-

dows of which a few idle men watched, with languid interest, the second invasion of the Hesselburgh dog-cart that morning; and so down Minster-gate, the narrow, precipitous alley which formed the chief approach to the cathedral.

Here were several good houses of the old-fashioned sort, built right upon the street, one solitary step leading up to their unpretentious brass-handled doors; and on one of these an immaculate plate, the fresh ebony of its lettering testifying to its recent appearance, bore Richard Forde's name legibly set forth.

Mrs. Hancock, purple sprigged costume and all, was making her way down Minster-gate, to call on the wife of the canon in residence. Her ever-watchful eye descried, with no common feeling of outrage, the Saxons stopping at the young doctor's door.

'A whole batch of them,' she subsequently complained to Mrs. Shorthouse,

‘dashing about completely unchaperoned, as usual, two girls and two young men, up in the air in that dangerous, fast turn-out of theirs, going to turn the head of that poor little Leonora Forde, who has airs enough already, poor child, owing to her cruelly unprotected position. Well! I am thankful to say I have never visited at Hesselburgh, never allowed myself to be mixed up with their promiscuous, half-professional set. I am sure they are quite lowering the tone of society in Norchester; and what with the goings on at the Palace, the theatricals and dancing, I am sure its enough, as I repeatedly say to the Miss Presses, to make our own poor late bishop turn in his grave.’

It would be untrue to assert that the arrival of that magical dog-cart did not send a little thrill and flutter through Leo’s exciteable frame, as she saw it from her decorously curtained drawing-room

windows. The gay young people inside belonged to a world of which the doctor's young sister had only had very occasional glimpses in her life, as yet. In her uncle Roper's parish, the middle-aged, childless squire and squiress had kept no company and cared for no society. 'We are quite out of the county,' Mrs. Roper had been wont to say; which, seeing that the whole of England is popularly supposed to be divided into counties, gives rise to some confusion as to the exact geographical position of Sandwater vicarage.

But, as dear Jane Austen says, if a young woman is born to be a heroine, the perversity of forty surrounding families cannot hinder it; and so with Leo. The uncertainly located parish of Sandwater was left behind for ever, she was mistress of her brother's house in Norchester, and here was the Hesselburgh party stopping at her very door.

The vision lasted only a minute or two. The tall dark man, sitting behind with Miss Saxon, sprang lightly down, rang, and was admitted. His party only waited till the door closed upon him, and then with nods and smiles dashed off again down to the cathedral, the street here being too narrow to turn the horse with safety. Leo had just time to notice the pretty girl seated beside Tom, to yearn for a coat that should fit like hers, and just such gauntlet gloves, when Dick pushed open the door of the pretty little room and said,

‘This is my sister, Major Westmorland.’

The tall Major greeted Leo without a smile. He was so very stiff and grave, and bored-looking, that the young girl was seized with almost the first fit of shyness she had ever experienced. She did just venture to ask him to sit down, to which he responded ‘Thanks,’ and remained stiffly standing. This chilling want of

compliance so abashed her, that she sank into her low chair and took up her work, feeling quite at a loss. Dick, saying that he would order up lunch immediately, had vanished, leaving them to themselves; and surely if the Major had not possessed a heart as hard as Benedick's, he need have found nothing in the arrangement to complain of.

Leo, in her low chair, was a picture worth contemplating. She wore a white dress, simple as could be; her soft, loose, dark hair was cunningly coiled round her pretty little head. Her complexion was radiant, her colour just a little bit heightened, and the most becoming shade of resentment on her coaxing, full mouth. Poor Dick could not know that such was the irritation of the Major's feelings at this moment, that the very fact of finding himself *tête-à-tête* with an unmarried woman reduced him to the last stage of supreme exasperation.

Leo was furious with herself. She told herself that it was her fault. She ought to know what to say to people of this description. A 'county' girl would entertain him properly and easily. The silence soon became quite unendurable to her frank, confiding disposition. She must talk. After due deliberation she started.

'You knew Dick at Woolford didn't you?'

He looked vaguely at her.

'Dick?' he said, as if the name conveyed no impression to his mind.

'Richard, my brother,' said poor Leo, with a rush of warm blood to her cheeks.

'Oh—ah! Pardon, I'm sure. Yes, I knew him at Woolford.'

'You were in Colonel Barff's regiment, were you not?' she persisted, bravely.

'I was.'

'It was through Colonel Barff that Dick got this practice. I was very glad, of course.'

‘ Oh ?’

‘ Yes, because he could have me to live with him, you see. He could not do that before.’

Utter silence. It was not to be endured. Miss Forde arose, trembling with indignation.

‘ If you will excuse me a moment, I will go and hurry luncheon ; you must be very hungry,’ she said, icily.

The Major went, with a start of alacrity, to open the door for her. At that moment the bell rang.

‘ Oh ! that is lunch. Please come down,’ said she, sweeping haughtily out before him, all her small dignity on the bristle.

But the bristle was quite wasted on her guest. He went downstairs after her quite mechanically, and took his seat at the dainty little luncheon-table without a thought of Forde’s sister, except relief at being no longer obliged to talk to her alone.



He woke up a little at lunch, chatting to his friend, and once directly addressed an observation to Leo, who answered him with such alarming frigidity as to cause Dick to glance up in astonishment at a tone never before adopted by his merry little sister.

As soon as ever her carefully-concocted repast had been discussed, she rose and turned to him.

‘You and Major Wesmorland will smoke in the surgery, I suppose,’ she said. ‘I will send coffee in half-an-hour. Meanwhile, I will say good-bye to you,’ turning to Evelyn. ‘I have to go out. Dick, if you have time, look in at the Residence about five, and fetch me.’

So saying, she bowed to the visitor and departed. Dick looked after her a little bewildered, and with an anxious glance at his friend to see if he were offended.

Westmorland was heaving a prodigious sigh of relief.

‘Now at last I can talk to you,’ he said, putting his hand through the doctor’s arm. ‘Come, sit down, my good fellow, I shall burst in a minute if I don’t have it all out.’

Upstairs, Leo was enduring the keenest mortification which she had ever suffered. She had taken such pains!—so carefully prepared her little house, and her little self, to receive her brother’s friend nicely. She had gathered fresh flowers from the quaint walled garden at the back of her small domain; she had taken an hour to arrange her small drawing-room, another to garnish her luncheon-table. All had been in vain. The visitor had noticed neither her nor her surroundings. He had eaten mechanically, he had looked without seeing; he was an ill-bred, hateful, uninteresting man.

This was a great pity, because he was decidedly good-looking. Did he mean to be rude—to ignore her? Did he mean

her to see that she was not to consider herself on a level with Muriel Saxon and her friends. Or did he consider her too absurdly young to be worth considering, or treating like a grown-up person? Oh, how she longed to be able to crush him—to retaliate, or in some unmistakable way to show him that he had snubbed the wrong person.

Let her but have her opportunity, poor Evelyn would fare ill at her hands.

## CHAPTER V.

## A SUNDAY MOON.

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.

ROBERT BROWNING.

‘Now at last! You are quite sure you are ready to be bothered?’ said Westmorland, with eagerness, as he sank into a comfortable chair.

‘Quite,’ said Dick, calmly, settling himself very much at his ease opposite. ‘More than ready, anxious. You do look so uncommonly worried, old chap.’

‘Yes, that’s what I am. It is really telling upon me,’ returned the Major, dis-

consolately ; ‘ and yet the whole story is a parcel of such abominable trash that I should not be in the least surprised if you were to burst out laughing when you hear it first. I know I did.’

‘ Well, what is it ?’

‘ It’s an old, idiotic, purposeless family tradition, and my father has gone clean out of his mind on the point,’ said Westmorland shortly. ‘ That’s the long and short of it, and a pretty tale it is to have to tell of a cultivated man of this nineteenth century ; but I believe my father never was quite like other people. Now, you are specially interested in various forms of insanity, are you not ?’

Dick nodded.

‘ This is a most pronounced case. He is quite sane on every other point, on this one as mad has any hatter.’

‘ Tell me what is the tradition, to begin with. Where did it come from ? Has it

any authority? Is it genuine? How did he come to hear it?’

‘Exactly what I am going to tell you. I believe the prophecy to be so far genuine, that it dates back at least to the fourteenth century. We Westmorlands originally, I believe, came from the Border, and had a Scotch strain in us, which seems to have included the highly inconvenient gift of second-sight. As our ancestors grew more civilized, or more wealthy as the case may be, they migrated further south, to Feverell, where a Westmorland of Henry VII.’s time built Feverell Chase. Our pedigree has been very carefully preserved for several centuries, and it is a curious coincidence that the property has never, till the last generation, been without an heir in the direct line. Either the eldest son or his eldest son has always succeeded, until my own father, whose elder brother Charles died suddenly, young and un-

married. Excuse all this apparent digression—the reason for it will soon be obvious.’

‘Take your time. I’m always interested in old families,’ said Dick, puffing away.

‘Well, when my governor came into possession of the Chase, he instituted a thorough search among the family archives. They had been much neglected in the days of my grandfather, who was, from all I can hear, an exceedingly commonplace person, like myself. His wife, however, Lady Camilla Hawtrey, was a most gifted woman, and from her, doubtless, my father inherits his talents ; for, you know, he is certainly brilliant above the average. He is an archæologist, a connoisseur in art, a bit of a poet, a painter, and altogether what I should call a *dab* at things literary and artistic. Naturally enough, his family history is of paramount interest to him. It is his hobby, his weak point. Well, as

he was digging out old letters, and wills and deeds, he came across this old rhyming prophecy. It was written by hand, and fastened with seals into the fly-leaf of an ancient, illuminated missal. It was dated below by the monk who wrote it, with the date of fourteen hundred and something or other, but with a note to the effect that, though here set down for the first time, it was of far greater antiquity, and was prophesied against the Westmorlands by the lord of the manor of Burchys, whoever he may have been. It appears that some dispute had arisen between the families, and the Westmorlands had satisfied their notions of family honour by butchering the son and grandson of this lord of the manor, so that he was left without heirs. In not unnatural annoyance he threw off this little *jeu d'esprit*, and sent it to his enemies with his kind regards. I don't know whether or no it worried them at the time, but cer-



tainly that old lord of the manor has got his innings now. He must be thoroughly satisfied if he knows how his rubbishing doggerel embitters my existence.'

The tone was so tragic that Dick could not repress a smile.

'I knew you'd laugh,' said the Major, gloomily, 'but you would laugh with the other side of your mouth if you had to live with my father. Here, read the insane thing, and you will be still more diverted. Tell me if you understand how anybody can attach the slightest importance to it. Of course this is only a copy; the original is almost illegible—no breaks between the words, and no stops.'

The young doctor curiously took from his hand the paper he held out, and read the following :

'Westmorlonde was bolde to stryke  
In that londe was none hym lyke,  
But all to naught hys house shulde pyne,  
Wo them ys that are born thereinne,

Withouten hope it shulde betyde,  
The last sonne ys an only childe.  
Sonne ys he of a yonger sonne,  
Ner wife ne childer hath he non,  
But yet the folk of the contré,  
Beleve not that hit mygth be,  
Gyf March with Sunday moon come inne,  
Then wolde they beleve fayn.'

Dick perused this with a puzzled face.

'Is it quite certain,' at last he said, 'that this thing dates back as far as the fifteenth century?'

'Oh, yes, it's genuine enough as far as age goes,' said Westmorland, fretfully. 'By the way it was found in the sacristy of the private chapel at Feverell, it could scarcely have been forged; but my father submitted it to a large number of experts before he would believe that it was the age it claims to be. However, they all decided that there was no doubt at all on the matter. Even if Father Julius, who professed merely to copy it out, in reality invented the horrid thing himself, still it

remains a prophecy, dating from the fifteenth century, confound it !'

'It's rather odd, isn't it ?' said Dick, thoughtfully, staring at the irregular lines with knitted brow. 'You're an only son, are you not ?'

'I am, as you know, worse luck !'

'And you are the son of a younger son, and you have no wife nor child.'

'True—all of it.'

'Well then, we come to this dark saying about the Sunday moon. What does that mean exactly ?'

'I should think it means, when the new moon falls on Sunday, March 1st.'

'Not a very common coincidence, I should imagine ?'

'By no means. It has happened twice in a hundred and fifty years ; it will happen again next year.'

Dick whistled.

'Forde,' burst out the Major, angrily,

‘I do believe you are superstitious.’

‘A little bit, perhaps,’ assented Dick, reluctantly, after a pause.

‘You don’t mean to say that you would put any faith in that astounding piece of nonsense?’ fiercely cried Westmorland.

‘I almost think I’d take precautions,’ laughed the doctor.

‘Precautions? What precautions, in the name of common-sense?’

Dick laughed again.

‘Get married, and the whole thing falls to the ground,’ he suggested, slyly.

This was too much; the Major’s very fury made him calm.

‘Forde,’ he said, icily, ‘you are worse than my father. Well! I am sorry to have troubled you.’

‘Westmorland, I’ll fool no more,’ pleaded Dick, penitently. ‘It was a bit funny, you know. I felt compelled to suggest it; but seriously now, tell me more of this.’

You say this prophecy took complete hold of your father's mind ?'

'Most unaccountably. Not when he first discovered it. My mother was then alive ; it seemed hardly probable that I should be the only child, and most unlikely that I should not marry. As time went on, I think he forgot it a good deal. After my mother's death he travelled about considerably, both in Europe and Asia. My regiment was ordered to India, and he came out and wintered there, and enjoyed himself greatly. It was about five years ago that he began to be really what I call mad on the subject. There was a Miss Hume out there in India, where my regiment was quartered, he took a fancy to her, and wanted me to do the same. I did not see it. Everybody called her a nice girl, so I suppose she was, but she seemed to me to be ready to flirt with any man who happened to come handy. I told my father

he had better marry her himself if he thought so highly of her ; but he is too fond of his liberty for that. However, I was rather incautious, I think ; said something about having no intention of marrying, or rather to that effect ; and so managed to set alight all this commotion about the prophecy.

He took to reading it, poring over it, searching up old authorities, digging into monkish chronicles. In some antiquated county history—I forget what they call it—he found a mention of the existence of this threat, and of course that was the last straw. The history said that the chronicles of Barnisham monastery (destroyed at the Reformation) contained an account of an application from Evelyn Westmorland for a dispensation from the Pope, to allow him to put away his wife, mainly on the ground of her childlessness, an old prophecy in the family foretelling great

evils if the succession departed from the direct line. Fortunately the poor lady herself settled the question by dying; and her fond husband, as our family tree informs us, had eight children by his second marriage. I think my father's mind was always highly emotional, easily influenced. His researches and their results developed mania. He had a calendar forecast—solar and lunar, and so discovered that next year the prophecy will apply in all its details. Since then I have not had a moment's peace. Morning noon and night is he at me when we are together, regularly every day does he write to me when we are apart. The thing is poisoning my existence, it has transformed him from a cultivated gentleman to a monomaniac, and really I have completely lost patience.'

'If you will pardon me,' said Dick, interrogatively, 'for what purpose is your father *at* you, as you so forcibly express

it? What does he want you to do?’

‘To do? Why, what you just now had the impertinence to suggest—to marry.’

There was a world of derision in the Major’s voice. Dick remained for a few moments dreamily puffing away at his pipe, his eyes fixed on the tall hollyhocks in the garden. At last,

‘Pardon the unspeakable temerity of the question,’ he said, removing his gaze to his friend’s thunder-cloud brow, ‘but why don’t you marry, Westmorland?’

The fury of his companion reached a pitch. He sprang from his chair and walked noisily once or twice through the room.

‘I decline to discuss the question,’ he said at last, in tones of the keenest irritation. ‘What has that to do with it all? What does it matter? It is beside the point.’

‘You may of course discuss it or not,



just as you please,' said Dick, very calmly, and without removing his pipe from his mouth, 'but it seems to me that it is very intimately connected with the point.'

'Hang it, Forde, you would not go and marry on such poor grounds? Sacrifice some unfortunate girl to an inane fragment of monkish superstition! How would such a marriage be likely to turn out?'

'But, apart from this question altogether, it seems strange you don't marry—that is my meaning. Most men are married before your age. It looks to me like a bit of perversity, you know: as though you had been so often egged on to do it that you had determined to resist merely for resistance sake.'

'I don't think it's that,' said Westmorland, rather sadly. 'It is that I am not that kind of man. I—I am not what you call impressionable. I am not a brilliant talker, as you well know; I don't care to

carry cups of tea about a drawing-room, or waltz all night round and round till my head splits. And that is all women care about, unless you get hold of one who frightens you to look at, and talks Aristotle to you. I never have seen the woman I could possibly endure to have always near me, far less the woman I could love. I think,' sighed he, sadly, 'I must be born out of my own century. The women of to-day are not my style.'

'What century should you have chosen, had you been given *carte blanche*?' casually asked Dick.

'Oh, I don't know. I should like an honest girl, and one that could keep herself to herself: one that would not be everlastingly dressing and going out—but a companion. I don't want a housekeeper . . . But what on earth is the use of talking? I can't tell you what she should be like, only that she should be quite unlike

every other woman I have ever met.'

'Well,' said Dick, 'I think you are rather a promising candidate for matrimony myself. I have decided hopes of you. A man like you always marries something about as unlike what he fancies as can possibly be imagined.'

The Major gave a contemptuous laugh.

'Of course, any man may make a fool of himself,' he observed. 'I won't undertake to say that such a thing is impossible as regards me; but I do emphatically consider that it is most unlikely. As if to give me a still further warning, if warning were needed, here is Disney—my best friend Disney—just come a most complete cropper as regards his matrimonial schemes.'

'Disney!' said Forde, with interest. 'Poor Disney! has he indeed? Nice fellow, I always liked him. Exchanged into the —th when it was ordered to Ceylon, didn't he?'

‘Yes, and that was the worst day’s work he ever did in his life, poor chap! You knew him, of course? He went to Ceylon; got engaged to the reigning belle there—a Miss Merrion. She jilted him, and it has gone fearfully hard with him; he is coming home—has thrown up everything. That’s a woman’s doing!’

‘Did somebody more eligible turn up? I mean, what made her jilt him?’ asked Dick.

‘Well, I really am not quite clear. If it was as you suggest, Disney does not mention it. They had a disagreement, I believe, and she dismissed him then and there.’

‘Perhaps it was his fault,’ observed Dick.

‘How could that be?’ sharply questioned the Major.

‘Why, he may have been in the wrong.’

‘But he wrote and implored her to

re-consider it; went and knelt to her, I believe; did everything in his power! Don't tell me, sir. A woman who can solemnly plight her faith to a man, and then turn it all up in a minute because of some little wretched misunderstanding—I tell you they are all the same: you never know what it is you have done to offend them, till suddenly they turn round upon you. So uncertain women are. No matrimony for me, thank you.'

'Well, in that case, I see no remedy for your present distress, I am afraid.'

'Forde, are you speaking seriously?'

'Quite. You must either endure your father's entreaties patiently until the fatal date has gone by, or you must marry at once and calm his superstitious terror. Let me see—when may you consider yourself safe? I hardly know. The prophecy is not too explicit as to exact date:

“ Gyf March with Sunday moon come inne,  
Then wolde they beleve fayn.”

You see, you are instructed only to look out for the fulfilment on that day: when it will come remains unrevealed.’

‘ But can’t you understand that I want you to help me? To put a stop to such intolerable folly; to see my father, to diagnose him, to scatter his delusion somehow.’

The doctor leaned meditatively forward; his pipe between his lips, his two hands spread out and lightly joined.

‘ I really don’t see what I could do in that way,’ he said at last. ‘ You don’t want him shut up, I suppose? He is sane enough on other points. He does no harm, does he? Is not dangerous?’

‘ Not dangerous, isn’t he? Going about on my behalf, proposing in my name to every good-looking girl he meets——’

‘ Does he do that, though?’

‘Well, very nearly.’

Dick was unable to help laughing.

‘What a gay old boy!’ he said, with unconcealable appreciation of the humour of the situation.

The Major looked first annoyed, then resigned.

‘I suppose it is funny,’ he said, hopelessly. ‘When first it began I used to look on it in that light. Hanged if I can see the ludicrous side of it now.’

He rose as if he felt it useless to discuss the subject further; but Dick, rising too, laid his hand on his arm.

‘Look here,’ he said, ‘I think you are too desponding if, as you say, you consider the whole of this prophecy to be nonsense. You have only to submit to this sort of annoyance calmly for a few months, and leave it to time to prove the reasonableness of your conduct. Don’t shake your head; I know it’s very bad to bear, but

why don't you get out of it? Winter abroad. Go to India for some tiger-shooting, and don't come back till the coast is clear.'

The Major shook his head.

'You don't know my father,' he said; and in his voice was that pitying tenderness with which a mother might own that her darling was afraid of the dark. 'I could never leave him,' he added, quietly, 'he would go raving mad, I am sure of it. You have never seen him as I have. Come up to Hesselburgh.'

The young doctor reddened.

'I don't know the Saxons.'

He did not add how much he wished to know them. In his own quiet way, Richard was ambitious. He knew he was clever, he wanted to make a career. Fresh from the hospital, full of ideas, *au courant* with all the modern improvements, he felt almost inclined to despair of Norchester.



Mrs. Saxon seemed the only person likely to sympathize with him. He had heard rumours of the forthcoming monster meeting of the Women's Sanitary League in her grounds. He did ardently long to have some share in the demonstration.

‘Oh, I’ll introduce you,’ said the Major, calmly. ‘Young Saxon told me this morning that he wanted to know your sister.’

‘Did he indeed?’

‘Yes; they are sociable people, very kind. I’ll introduce you, and get you to watch my father. I want to know if something can’t be done. In short,’ concluded the Major, taking up his hat, ‘something *must* be done. You will see that I cannot marry, according to my own notions of honour, so that solution of the difficulty is impossible. If only we could somehow twist that confounded prophecy, and persuade him that it meant something quite

different! But you shall see him, Forde, and then we will consult again.'

'Very good, I will. I wish you were not so set against matrimony. I am quite upset by what you tell me about Disney. Who was the girl who treated him so shamefully?'

'Miss Merrion.'

'And you say he is coming home?'

'By the *Malabar*.'

'I shall ask him to come and stay with me, and teach him a little philosophy,' said Dick, laughing.

## CHAPTER VI.

‘ I THINK YOU KNEW A FRIEND OF MINE.’

My friend was already too good to lose,  
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,  
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose,  
And over him drew her net.

ROBERT BROWNING.

‘ It’s all very well,’ said Tom, irritably,  
‘ but it is really nonsense to tell me you  
profess to understand this sort of thing.  
Hand over the beastly volume, Hope, and  
I’ll read you a selection.’

‘ I shall certainly not hand over my pre-  
cious book to you! You Goth! You  
Vandal! You boy without a soul!’

‘ You girl without a brain! I tell you

what! One very salutary result has accrued from all my education. It has developed my critical faculty, it has given me an inquiring mind. When I see something in print I don't take it for granted that it's sense, I ask at once, Why is this thus? What is the reason of this thusness? Now, if you were to imitate me in this, and solemnly ask yourself the why and wherefore of some of old Browning's remarks, why you'd collapse! You couldn't go on admiring him, you would say, as I say: The unintelligible is not the beautiful, the incoherent is not the admirable. Lucidity does not make a man a poet, but no man can be a poet who is not lucid. That's what you would say if you had my felicitous flow of language, Hope! Which you haven't, Hope!

'Do you really mean me to infer that you think Mr. Browning should have brought down his poetry to the level of

Mr. Thomas Saxon's understanding?' demanded Hope with scorn ineffable, as she lay back in a luxurious wicker chair in Muriel's sitting-room at Hesselburgh.

It was the witching hour of five-o'clock tea. The three young people had played tennis to their heart's content all the afternoon, and now sat exhaustedly in their tennis costumes, enjoying themselves, 'revelling,' as Hope said, 'in the luxury of an honestly earned fatigue,' and quarrelling, as usual.

Muriel was motionless behind the pages of the last new novel—she left Hope and Tom to fight over Robert Browning as they pleased. Tom was on his back on the sofa, fanning himself with his shapeless tennis hat and ready for the fray, as usual.

'We are crushing,' he remarked, with a fine disdain, in answer to Hope's thrust; 'but better men than I am can't digest

your pet poet, my lady ; you know that as well as I do.'

'I suppose many people console themselves with the idea that they are not the only fools in the world, Mr. Tom.'

'And many others do love to plume themselves on understanding what another fellow can't, don't they, duckie?'

'That is a position in which many of your friends must be apt to find themselves, whether they wish it or not!'

'Ah! I suppose that is why I have so many friends. It is not a very flattering suggestion, but I feel at last I know the reason why I am sought out so persistently by the great and noble ones of the land. Thanks, so much, for enlightening me!'

'Another cup of tea, please, Tom.'

This brought the critic to a sitting posture, and for a moment stopped his tongue.

'My dear maligned Browning,' fondly

said Hope, gazing lovingly at the page before her. 'So they say you are unintelligible, do they? They call you unmelodious! Tom, listen to this:

'If at times

My heart fails, as monotonous I paint  
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles  
With the same series—virgin, babe and saint,  
With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard;  
At least no merchant traffics in my heart!  
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward  
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart.  
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine,  
Where, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,  
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,  
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke!

The delicate clear girl's voice gave the most just expression to the devotion breathed in the rhythmical lines. The mixture of spiritual fervour and natural longing after recognition from the world, trembled in each sad utterance.

'There!' she said, with a sigh, 'I never read that without feeling as if I stood in one of those dim continental churches,

with their odour of stale incense; their smoky gloom mellowing the trumpery finery of their shrines into harmony, and their stillness drawing you irresistibly down on your knees to pray.'

'Oh, yes, that's the unknown painter fellow, isn't it?' said Tom, who was by no means as ignorant as he pretended. 'I don't believe in him a bit, you know. He would have been famous if he could—you bet! Old Baily, our head-master, used to dose us with Browning on a Sunday afternoon, and some of the fellows were very keen on it; but it isn't my line. Poor old Pictor! How awfully out he was, if he only knew,

"The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward  
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart."

If only he had been in Dresden with me and heard the Yankee's remark on the Sistine madonna!



‘But she is not hung in a church,’ objected Hope.

‘No, but in a room by herself, you know; and everybody talks with bated breath, and a sort of hush falls over you when first you go in, and there is a pause. Well! my Yankee walked right in, and stood, hands behind him, staring up for a minute or so: then, turning to the misguided friend who had accompanied him, he said, very loud, “She’s an uncommonly fine-looking girl. I’ve a cousin remarkably like her myself, in the States.”’

‘Tom!’

‘That’s a solemn fact. I heard him say it. He asked me the next night at table-d’hôte, which of Shakespeare’s plays had Valentine and Orson in it. He was a treat. But I liked him. He told me if I would come over to Brooklyn, he would see that I had front places everywhere!’

‘Did he truly say that of the San Sisto?’

‘He truly did. Ask Muriel if you don’t believe me. She heard it. But now, hand over that old Browning. You have given me an extract, I’ll give you one. Where is the thing? I know it’s got a title that has nothing whatever to do with it, like one of Albert Moore’s pictures, don’t you know? Two flabby girls in green and yellow draperies lolling on a bath-room floor, one with a book, the other with a holly-hock. You consult the catalogue and find the title of the picture is “Nightshade.” After a few painful moments, in which you feel as if you had lost your senses, you descry three red berries in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas. Well, that’s one of Browning’s dodges, all over! Listen to this :

“Soft !” I’d say, “soul mine  
Three-score and ten years  
Let the blind mole mine,  
Digging out deniers !  
Let the dazed hawk soar,  
Claim the sun’s rights too !

Turf 't is thy walk's o'er,  
Foliage thy flight's to!"

What have you to say to those two last lines, eh, miss? Shall I take them for a model of style?"

Hope's eager answer died away suddenly, for there was a modest tap at the door.

'That's nurse,' observed Tom, 'she shall be umpire. I'll read over this verse, and see if she finds the sense obvious. Come in, old lady! Don't be bashful!'

The door opened, and Major Westmorland walked somewhat hesitatingly in.

Up flew Tom, with an irreverent exclamation.

'Major! I beg your pardon! I thought you were nurse!'

'You compliment me,' said the Major, smiling; 'I feel as if I were intruding, but Mrs. Saxon sent me in for some tea.'

'Wake up Muriel, ring for fresh tea, and we'll each move on a place like the hatter,'

cried Tom. 'Come, here's a first-class chair! Sit down and tell us what Miss Forde said to you.'

The visitor obediently sat down, settling himself in his chair with a manner decidedly his own—impossible to describe, but very characteristic.

He was one of those men who are remembered for their manners more than for their faces. Not that his manner was so very good, but that it was so exceedingly distinctive. No disguising would disguise him, his every action would betray his identity.

He sat down with a sense of comfort and ease. He had walked the five miles from Minster-gate to Hesselburgh, and had come in both hot and dusty. Rest was sweet, and the pretty rose-scented room exquisitely refreshing. Moreover, the pouring out of his mind to his friend Forde had been a great relief, though no

very satisfactory solution of his difficulties had been arrived at. He felt more sociable, more ready to be amused than when he encountered poor Leo at luncheon time.

His eye rested with a sense of satisfaction on Hope's slim young figure, occupying only half of the big chair she sat in. Her pale pink gown threw up her nut-brown hair in pleasant relief; the two hands folded lightly on her lap, with a fresh cambric handkerchief lightly crushed between, were such well-shaped, ladylike, charming little hands, that he could hardly have desired a more pleasing object for his lazy gaze to rest upon. Muriel too, calm and fair, pouring out fresh tea, gave a comforting impression of boundless leisure; fine weather and other ingredients for happiness all being a matter of course. Everything always was a matter of course to Muriel. Nothing that occurred ever

seemed to surprise or disconcert her. If it were wet, it appeared trivial to complain of anything so entirely expected; if fine, the bare idea of having supposed it would be anything else seemed preposterous.

There was no pretence about any of the three—they seemed so simple that the lonely fellow's heart went out to them. It would be pleasant to make a fourth among them, he thought. Surely these two girls were not designing—they were not after the type of the Colombo Miss Merrion, whose name seemed always ringing in his ears. He was so sick of the country-house girl of the period, with her elaborate tea-gowns and *coiffures*, her boundless experience in flirtation, her worldliness and cynicism and *savoir faire*. He was indeed glad that they had come to Hesselburgh instead of accepting Lord Bala's invitation. He knew the coverts here of old. He would get plenty of sport every day if he

chose, and look forward to coming in to a cup of tea in this bewitching room, with these three happy young beings to divert him with their fresh nonsense.

He sat for about twenty minutes, listening delightedly to their chatter—saying nothing himself, but keenly enjoying all the nonsense talked by the others. Only once was he directly appealed to, and that by Tom, on the all-important Browning question. After a little hesitation the Major was fain to confess to a decided liking for the poet in question; on which Hope softly clapped those expressive little hands together, so letting the handkerchief flutter to the ground, and giving him a chance to stoop his tall head till he had reclaimed it. A little whiff of violets came from it as he returned it to its owner. He thought that Hope somehow suggested violets, and wondered what her other name was.

She was evidently not quite so young as Miss Saxon. There was a pretty little assumption of seniority in her manner, but still she was young; the bloom of girlhood still hung on her small, smooth cheeks, there were no dark lines under the limpid eyes. That fresh enjoyment of life just for the sake of living, which belongs only to youth, was evidently hers. The flash of that sudden smile—that smile revealing such an unexpected, tantalizing, wonderful dimple just in the corner of the sweet, frank mouth—oh, that was indeed the smile of youth, free and unburdened with memories, the smile of that liberty which comes only of a clear conscience. So reflected the Major for his own delectation, while Tom was narrating spicily to Hope how a certain London firm sent emissaries to the pit of every London theatre to collect orange-peel for their marmalade; and, when he had succeeded in making



her feel quite sick, consolingly adding that all theirs was home-made, and she might really rely on it.

At this unwelcome moment one of the footmen appeared at the door.

‘Miss Saxon and Mr. Thomas is wanted in the drawing-room, to see Admiral and Mrs. Bligh.’

‘It is always like that just when we are comfortable,’ said Muriel, rising with perfect serenity. ‘Major Westmorland, I must leave you to amuse Miss Merrion.’

A sudden dead silence fell, as the door closed on the brother and sister. Major Westmorland stood with knit brows, looking puzzled; he thought he had heard incorrectly.

‘Excuse my stupidity, but *what* did Miss Saxon say your name was?’ he asked.

‘My name is Merrion,’ she answered, —with that smile!

‘I suppose you are no relation of some

Merrions I heard about,' he said, nervously. 'Were you ever in Ceylon?'

There was a look, yes! Undoubtedly there was a look as of some memory that was not pleasant in Hope's clear eyes.

'Yes, I was in Colombo all last winter. I have not long been home.'

He could not believe his ears. But no! Impossible! This could not be the girl! She must have a sister.

'You have a sister, have you not?' he asked, eagerly.

She shook her head.

'Two brothers, but no sister.'

Horror! He felt as if he, like his father, were going mad. Could it be conceivable that this fresh, innocent-faced girl was the very woman whose name he execrated above all women just then, the woman who had broken his friend's heart? Oh, if it were so, then was every woman ever born a mass of lies and treachery—the

fairer her face the deeper the depth of untruth it concealed. He was resolved to ascertain ; for, if this were true, then never would he believe in any feminine thing hereafter for ever.

‘ If you were in Colombo last winter,’ he slowly said, ‘ I think you knew a friend of mine out there, Captain Disney.’

The colour flew to the girl’s face, suffusing neck and brow in a scarlet tide. He could see how the name moved her. She did not answer for a minute or two ; perhaps she could not command her voice. At last,

‘ Was it from Captain Disney that you heard about me?’ she asked, looking straight at the Major as she put the question.

‘ It was,’ he answered, drily, yet unable, for some reason, to help feeling mean as he met that direct gaze.

She saw, most likely, the curled lip, the

bitter contempt in his face as they confronted each other, but she did not waver. She had risen too, and stood before him, slight and girlish and slim in her simple gown; so innocuous to look upon, and yet he could feel how dangerous she was.

‘He is a great friend of yours?’ she asked.

‘He is a great friend; my best.’

‘I think we had better not speak of him,’ she said, gently.

‘I entirely agree with you. I could not trust myself to speak of him, to you.’

Without another word she turned and walked out of the room, closing the door behind her. The little handkerchief again fell to the ground, and again, as the door shut, the Major picked it up. The whiff of violets were again discernible.

‘Faugh!’ he said, to himself, with feelings of the bitterest disgust, ‘that I should be in the house with her! Of all women

on this earth that I should be under the same roof with the girl who jilted Disney! And the last woman likely to do such a thing if one went by the look of her. What an extraordinary coincidence! What an unfortunate thing!

## CHAPTER VII.

## A DECLARATION OF WAR.

Utter contemptibility, nor more  
Nor less. Contemptibility—exempt  
How could I, from its proper due—contempt.  
R. BROWNING.

HOPE MERRION, as she walked swiftly along the corridor in the direction of her own room, was experiencing a feeling altogether new to her. Never once in her three or four years career as a 'grown-up young lady' had any male thing looked upon her save with approbation. This evening a man—a stranger—had dared to stand before her with indignant contempt in

every line of his strong face. He had scorched her with his scorn, he had lashed her with the expression of his angry eyes.

Of course it was, in itself, a little thing. What should Hope care for the unconcealed ill-opinion of one stray man? Why trouble that he should be ill-bred enough to show it?

It is hard for a woman, nevertheless, to endure a man's disdain.

Disney's friend! Poor Disney! And he despised her. He looked down upon her, as a fickle woman, who had laid his friend's heart in the dust and trodden on it for sport. She even laughed a little, though sadly, as she fancied for a moment the light in which Captain Disney's friend must regard her.

She walked into her room, which was flooded with evening sunshine. A lime-tree looked in through one of the windows; and its translucent leaves were wonderful with the effect of warm light through them.

The house was quite a modern one, built in the pretty 'Queen Anne' affectation of a few years ago; all the windows were casemented, and had deep window-seats. Miss Merrion went across her room and sat down, with her forehead against the stone mullion, and the lime branches softly caressing her innocent-looking cheek.

'And of course it is true,' she reflected. 'I did break it off. I cannot deny it. I cannot deny that he thought I treated him badly. Oh! the satire of it! *I* treated *him* badly!' A small sarcastic laugh escaped her. 'Oh, life is so very hard to live,' was her inward lament. 'It all goes on so nicely for a bit, you slip along so easily, and feel so content with yourself, and then all of a sudden, without any warning, there is a tangle and a knot, what my nurse used to call a "snarl" in my hair! . . . And you find everything has broken off short.



I had a presentiment this morning that something unpleasant was coming. That man! I wish he would go away.'

It was not so much the manifest disapproval of the Major, as the memories he had stirred, which so discomfited her. He had brought keenly to mind something that she wished so particularly to forget—her great mistake, the passage in her life which she must always so keenly regret. She hated the bare mention of her ill-fated visit to Ceylon. But this man's attitude put things in a new, a worse light. She felt as if she had never before appreciated her discarded lover's side of the question. She felt herself more to blame than ever before, in face of the righteous anger of the captain's friend. It was as unpleasant as novel, it stirred up a most distasteful feeling within her, a feeling of guilt. She struggled against the injustice of it, but could not banish it.

And now she had to be in the same house with the man who held this opinion of her. Day after day she would have to meet him and know what he thought. Oh, certainly, her pleasure was over; the visit should be shortened as much as decency permitted. How easy it had been to forget painful things in Tom's jovial company! How pleasant to run wild with him, and to enjoy each day as it rolled by, without caring for the days behind, or fearing those to come!

Now, the face of this man, Edgar Disney's friend, would reproach every peal of laughter, deprecate every light-hearted ramble. It would be a perpetual reminder, a constant calling to order, of the girl who had behaved so badly, and had so little right to exult in her unjustly recovered freedom. For the hundredth time in her life she wished she had never met Edgar Disney.

The vanity of that wish brought tears to her eyes, rare tears, for Hope very seldom cried.

Was it to be worse than she thought? A dark background henceforth inseparable from the picture of her life? A hot blush of shame crept over her small, expressive face; the hardly-wrung tears coursed each other unheeded over her cheeks. Her little mouth was drawn down piteously at the corners. Westmorland had made her very miserable. The small summer wind sighed sympathetically among the lime-leaves, and ruffled her pretty hair. The sun sank lower, lower towards the dark hill which would presently hide him from view. Hope felt very lonely.

A childish wish sprang up all uninvited in her heart for some one with strong arms to enfold her, a broad breast to support her forlorn head, a comforting voice to tell her that she must not be unhappy.

There was none such in the world. Her brother Fred was married, and lived a wealthy, common-place life in London, with his handsome, common-place wife and his three fine, healthy children. Her brother Herbert was with his regiment in Ceylon, and very much inclined to agree with Major Westmorland about Hope's treatment of Disney.

The girl was an orphan, and her nominal home was with Fred in Berkeley Square, or with her aunt, the Honourable Mrs. Paul, in Adelaide Crescent, Brighton. Neither of these homes was in any way congenial to the girl. She liked better to be with her school-friend, Muriel Saxon, than anywhere else. Now, in consequence of that wretched affair last winter, was her happiness here to be marred as well?

She was used to take a very healthy, rational view of life; there was nothing morbid or hysterical in her nature; re-

ping was a most unusual thing with her. But this evening she had this strange feeling of loneliness—such a sensation as might be the experience of an accused maiden in the lists with no champion to do battle for her.

‘There is no one to stand up for me,’ she reflected sadly. ‘Nobody, except Lady Caroline.’

Lady Caroline Loftus was an Irish cousin who had chaperoned Hope to Ceylon, and defended the girl through thick and thin. But Lady Caroline being the sole stay of her family, all more or less infirm and with incomes impaired by a long course of boycotting, was not by any means always available. Hope wanted her now.

She wanted some one to raise her in her own estimation, to soothe her ruffled pride, replace her lowered self-respect. But fruitless longing is as dangerous as well as a

strikingly futile occupation ; it begets 'tears, idle tears,' and other inconveniences in the shape of headaches and swollen eyelids. Leo Forde might have been surprised had she known how very much abased was the artistically-arranged head of the Hope who had smiled so buoyantly that morning from her seat at Tom's side in the dog-cart.

Hope bethought her in time that she must not appear at dinner with swollen eyelids, if only to avoid giving occasion of triumph to that odious Major. She applied first the traditional cold water ; then, with more success, *eau-de-Cologne*. Just as almost all traces were obliterated Bowen, her maid, appeared to dress her.

A small reaction had set in. Hope was angry at her own late break-down. She was defiant now, determined to show herself by no means conscience-stricken. Who was the Major, pray, that he or his opinion

should have any influence with her? She was not quite so weak as that, she should hope.

She dressed herself with special care, hung perilously out of her window to snatch some of the climbing *gloire de Dijons* for a finishing touch, and when she was ready, walked fearlessly down to what Tom called the 'week-day drawing-room,' prepared to brave whatever might befall.

Only one person was present when she entered—Mr. Westmorland the elder—seated at a Chippendale writing-table, carefully inscribing something in a small, delicately-bound volume. He looked very handsome as the evening light fell upon him, his gold nippers forming, as they often do with men, a decided improvement to his face and expression. It was never the custom of the Saxon family to assemble one moment before it was necessary. Mrs. Saxon and her ever-faithful spouse

were probably roaming the kitchen-gardens together, and contemplating the wall-fruit. Tom was doubtless in the stables, or giving a valedictory glance to his new retriever-pup; and Muriel was invariably late for everything.

Mr. Westmorland looked up, over his spectacles, as Hope rustled softly in.

‘Ah! Miss Merrion,’ he said, rising gallantly, ‘there you are! Let me find you a seat. How pretty the young ladies do look now-a-days in their well-fitting gowns. The young should always wear white! Ah, my dear, I am not a bigot, as so many old fogeys are, I march with the times. I freely admit that dress has improved tremendously of late. We had no such thing when I was young, no such thing as art applied to dress!’

Hope sank with a pleased laugh into the chair placed by the old beau.

‘Oh, how clever you are!’ she said, ‘you



have done me so much good with that pretty compliment. I was feeling a little dissatisfied with myself, and you not only saw what was amiss, but knew at once how to remedy it! Do I really look nice?’

She turned up to him a look of playful daring, before which his elderly outworks went down without a struggle. What a witch this girl was! For a moment his heart leapt within him as it flashed across him, that even Evelyn could hardly stand against a power such as this. Its unconsciousness was the charm of it. He remained for a moment transfixed. Many and many a pretty girl had he met, and he despised them all; but rarely had he encountered one with these allurements, with this subtle, nameless magic about her every look and tone.

‘Here for the first time in my life,’ he thought, ‘I see a woman whom men might

die for, a woman so far above the average nice girl that she could never be supplanted nor forgotten, a woman who, dead, could hold the life-long devotion of a living man, even in this cold-hearted century of ours.'

'How you look at me!' said Hope, tentatively. 'I am afraid you disapprove of my asking straight out for a compliment.'

'I am silent for want of inspiration, my dear young lady; an every-day compliment will hardly suit such a beauty as one meets once in a life-time.'

A soft glow of pleasure and interest lit up the girl's face. Leaning on her elbow she smiled at him.

'That is beautiful,' she said, 'it is like the compliments the gentlemen at Bath made in the time of Evelina! And you said it so well, quite as if you meant it! I like to be talked to like that. It makes

me feel as if I were on a pedestal.'—'He is far nicer than his son,' she was inwardly reflecting.

'If I were young again, Miss Merrion,' said he, with a gallant bow, 'you should hear what I could do in the way of a compliment. Ah! They have lost the art now-a-days! Worse than that, they pride themselves upon it. Had you been young when I was, you should have had more than pretty speeches! I would have written verses in your praise; I should not have been ashamed to serenade you either! In those days a young man was proud of his love, he cared not who knew how he adored his lady, whether she were kind or cruel. Ha!' he laughed satirically, 'we have indeed changed all that. Secresy is the order of the day—secresy, lest the tender masculine vanity should by chance receive a blow, lest anyone should guess that the valuable self has been offered and

rejected! The young men like to be on the safe side, Miss Merrion. If you refuse them in private, it is so easy for them to at least infer, if they do not announce, in public, that you were very ready to have had them, if they had but asked you! I know them! Insufferable puppies!

‘Oh, that is so true!’ said Hope, with vivacity. ‘So very true, indeed it is! I know a girl who was treated just like that! Do you know what the consequence is? That girls are beginning to think that, in self-defence, they must do away with reticence, and publish what hitherto they have felt it a point of honour to conceal! We shall soon begin to make lists of our victims’ names, as I hear they do in America.’

‘I should, if I were you,’ said Mr. Westmorland, with his admiring gaze fixed on the girl.

He was in elysium for the time being.

Every little movement, each fleeting expression and momentary gesture of this girl increased his admiration of her. Here indeed was a heart worth conquering, and, as his keen instinct told him, a heart not easily to be conquered. Oh, she was charming—charming! If Evelyn were not a very flint, he must be touched at last. Evelyn's father wished he were young again—wished that he were once more the handsome, dangerous Clifford Westmorland who had carried off the reigning heiress and beauty in the teeth of many rivals, being only a younger son, with nothing but himself to recommend him. Such an enterprise had been what his soul loved. Now the desire for it had passed away. Ill-health had robbed him prematurely of his youth—what he wanted was to see his own experience reproduced in his son. But no! Hopelessly stolid, hopelessly perverse, was Evelyn.

As his father frequently tauntingly told him, he seemed to be born without the capacity for love.

But, whatever might be the father's private opinion of his unimpressible son, it was by no means his policy to speak of him slightly to others—least of all to this girl, whom he already coveted as his daughter-in-law. Rather was it his aim, by a few casual, well-directed insinuations, to inspire an interest in this disappointing person, to seek to fire the feminine imagination with an idea which he himself believed to be the greatest of delusions—namely, that the Major, being such still water, ran very deep.

‘Yes,’ he said, reflectively, idly tapping one of his well-shaped, carefully *soignées* hands with his gold *pince-nez*, ‘I am always telling that son of mine that people will say he has been rejected if he goes about with that long face, and remains much

longer a bachelor. But my son is hard to please—a family failing: decidedly hard to please.’

‘Is he? I daresay,’ said Hope, unresponsively, and with a little inward shrinking from a disagreeable memory.

‘Oh, yes! Look at him—unmarried still! Some people might think he had been hard hit, you know; but I know better. I am in his confidence, and I know it is the family fate.’

It was Mr. Westmorland’s invariable custom to weave such pleasing fictions into his conversation, whenever the case seemed to require them. He paused a moment to enjoy the sound of these, and then resumed,

‘Have you ever noticed his chin—the prominence of his chin? That denotes ideality. Such a man will go through life seeking an ideal. If he realises it, well and good; if not, he will never be mated.

‘I should think the latter is more probable,’ said Hope, drily.

She was greatly amused. Tom had prepared her, it will be remembered, for the elder Westinorland’s vicarious love-making.

‘I should have said so yesterday, Miss Merrion,’ said the handsome old man, with so much intention that she almost laughed outright.

Just then the door opened, and the subject of this interesting conversation stalked solemnly into the room, his face rearing itself gloomily over his expanse of immaculate shirt-front.

Hope’s heart gave a nervous throb as he entered, and he, when he perceived her, remained at the further end of the room, and looked out of the most distant window.

‘Come and join us, Evelyn,’ said his father, in his blandest tones. ‘Miss Merrion and I are having a most interesting discussion on a very vital point—as to



what are likely to be the consequences to a man who goes through life with an ideal.'

'That is a subject on which I should imagine Miss Merrion to be excellently well qualified to speak,' said the Major, with slow composure. As he spoke, he stooped, unbolted the window, and passed out upon the lawn, where he was immediately seen in conversation with his host and hostess.

'The manners of a bear,' reflected his fond father, with wrath unspeakable.

'I hate him,' was Hope's simple reflection, as she bit her lip with resentment.

Mrs. Saxon walked into the room, removing from her shoulders the wrap she had worn for her garden excursion, and revealing herself in virgin white, as usual, her appearance conveying a general impression that head and neck and arms alike required covering, or adornment of some kind.

Her son dashed in at almost the same moment, hastily fastening the left cuff of his shirt, and with an air of having been hustled into his clothes at the shortest notice.

‘We won’t wait for Muriel; Major Westmorland, please take Miss Merrion,’ said Mrs. Saxon.

As she spoke, the door opened to admit of Muriel’s leisurely entrance, as cool as Tom’s had been flurried. Her the Major deliberately approached, offering his arm.

‘Muriel, oh! I said Hope,’ began Mrs. Saxon.

‘I thought you addressed my father,’ said Evelyn, innocently.

‘I see,’ thought Hope, defiantly, as with a merry smile at her hostess she took Tom’s joyfully extended arm and sailed away to the dining-room. ‘I see, he is going to give his mind to slighting me, to making my life a burden with little insults. All

very amusing, my dear sir, so long as you have it all your own way ; but two can play at that game, and I am not quite a novice either, as you may chance shortly to discover.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A NORCHESTER FESTIVITY.

My son will find revealed  
My love, by his. I bow resigned my head :  
But love, alas ! comes idly to the dead !

*Warburton Pike.*

THE Finches were of the more genial denizens of Norchester. They dwelt a mile or two out of the town, on the opposite side to Hesselburgh. The family was small, consisting only of a handsome, kindly, elderly man, and his third wife. Nature had not framed Mr. Finch to live alone ; and when his two helpmeets were successively carried from him, leaving no children to supply their places, his eminently sociable disposition

prompted him to seek a third. They were the sweetest tempered couple for miles around, and Duffield, as their pretty, comfortable, unpretentious place was called, was almost the only house where one met, united, those three deadly schisms—the county clique, the cathedral clique, and the town clique. It gave Mr. Finch just as much real pleasure to receive Mrs. Hancock and the Misses Press, and to fill them with his good things, as to entertain the Dean himself, with his cultivated paganism, and his hideous wife; or the Carey-Lenoxes, with their promiscuous troop of visitors, their scandalous little court stories, and their entire belief in their own superiority.

The Finches liked their visitors to come *en masse*. No ceremonious picking out of two representatives would satisfy the genial host.

‘Why, Mrs. Saxon,’ he would say, ‘where are all the young people you had

with you in the Minster last Sunday? Such a delightful group of pretty faces, I was looking forward to having my gardens decorated gratis !'

Mrs. Saxon approved of the Finches. She liked them because there was no humbug about them. Everything genuine found favour in her sight. She liked their *omnium gatherum* too. Priding herself on being a daughter of the people, she mixed with whom she chose, careless of any offence she so gave to local prejudice. She never declined an invitation to Duffield, knowing that there she was sure of meeting everybody, and of being thoroughly well amused.

The Hesselburgh party accordingly, on the day following the arrival of the Westmorlands, had orders to turn out in force to one of the Finches' big garden-parties.

'Seven of us,' said Mrs. Saxon with pride, surveying them all assembled in the

hall. 'Two for the victoria, four for the dog-cart—oh, are you going to ride, Athelstan?' addressing her husband.

'No, my dearest; the Major is going to ride,' said Mr. Saxon, amiably.

'Oh! How was that arranged?' demanded his wife, in some surprise. 'I thought the four young people preferred driving together?'

'Westmorland's own choice, *mater*,' said Tom, lightly, as he threw the dust-rug over Miss Merrion's knees; 'so Hope and I are going to sit behind, and *pater's* going to drive, and if we don't get spilt in the middle of the market-place, why my name isn't Tom Saxon, that's all!'

'Tom, you had better not let your father drive Maidenhair, you really had not,' said the *mater*, anxiously. 'Major Westmorland, I am afraid you are sacrificing yourself for the public weal.'

'On the contrary, I assure you,' replied

Evelyn, in those conventional tones which may mean anything you please.

‘Oh, well, settle it as you choose,’ said the lady, who never made a fuss about anything; ‘but, Athelstan, put on your spectacles I beg, or you will run into something to a certainty.’

‘Burrowes, you might put a little lint and arnica into the trap for bandaging the wounded,’ said Tom irreverently, to the footman. ‘It’s all serene, *mater*,’ he added consolingly; ‘Muriel can drive Maidenhair if she proves too much for *pater*.’

‘Oh, Muriel, to be sure,’ said Mrs. Saxon, in a relieved tone, stepping into the victoria with Mr. Westmorland.

‘Master Tom is a handful,’ observed that gentleman.

He disliked Tom because he never knew whether he was laughing at him or not, the young gentleman’s command of feature being great.



‘Tom?’ said the *mater*, coolly. ‘Oh, he’s very well in hand; but I give him his head a bit while he is fresh. If you hold them in too tight you spoil their mouth, you know; young men or colts, it is all the same.’

‘Ah, that is all very well, my dear madam,’ sighed the widower, ‘but it does not always answer. Give them an inch and they will take an ell. Look at my son.’

‘I do look at him, and a better son I never saw. He is a credit to your training.’

He heaved a sigh. Should he or should he not confide to this sympathising friend a part of his distress?

He stole a look at her. Much as he admired her ability and appreciated her *cuisine*, he did wish she were not quite so frankly, so undisguisably hideous. She wore a straw hat to-day, with a plain band

of ribbon—a hat which would have looked simply bewitching on Leo Forde. It was a caricature in its present position. Yet how kind she was! How he always enjoyed his visits to her house, the run of her library, the please-yourself ease and comfort of the whole *ménage*. His mouth seemed to become unsealed in spite of himself.

‘You must know that I am distressed about my son,’ he said.

‘Indeed!’ said she. ‘You surprise me.’

‘Ah! doubtless—doubtless. It is a great trouble to me, I freely own. It seems to me, Mrs. Saxon, that fathers and sons do not often understand each other.’

‘Very likely not. For the reason that many fathers, in their extreme folly, expect their sons to be like them. It is a most unusual thing, as my experience shows me, for a son to resemble his father closely, either in tastes or disposition.

Look at my Tom as a shining example! But is it impossible to understand a nature because it is unlike your own? I think not. And see what opportunities parents have—if they would but use them—of finding out their children's dispositions. When a child is young, it is unconscious; it will betray itself a thousand times a day: its natural tendencies lie bare before you. I know my two, as no human being on earth knows them. They are not in the least like either their father or me; but that does not distress us by any means.'

'Ah! no. Very true, as you say; but my son is a different sort: he is so terribly reserved.'

'Now, of course he is. Few men of his age wear their heart on their sleeve. But how about those days when he wore velvet frocks and long curls? He was scarcely reserved then, was he?'

‘I am sure,’ Mr. Westmorland was fain to confess—‘I am sure I have no distinct recollection of what he was. Young children have never interested me greatly. He was with his mother, or the nurses, I suppose.’

‘Ah! true—he has lost his mother,’ said Mrs. Saxon, with a sudden inflection of real pity in her voice. ‘It is the mother who is nature’s own detective—who can see through the child’s transparent wiles, distinguish shyness from want of feeling, and ignorance from impertinence. I have sometimes wished I had a larger nurseryful—it is so unspeakably interesting to watch the development of a family of children.’

‘Humph! I neglected my opportunities,’ said Evelyn’s father, drily. ‘I belong to an older school, Mrs. Saxon. I have always sympathised with Sir Anthony Absolute, I am bold enough to confess. I expect

that, when I give an order, my son shall obey it. If not, I have my remedy—I can disinherit him.’ He spoke with a suppressed excitement, red spots glowing in his pale cheeks, and tremulously, as if in defiant protest. ‘That is my theory—make them feel it. If they choose to be rebellious, appeal to their self-interest. No need to study individual temperament to discover that, madam; that’s a motive that appeals to all humanity, and saves endless trouble.’

‘And have you found it invariably successful?’ demanded the lady, with a coolness which rather took him aback.

He had expected, perhaps, surprise at his heretical doctrine—depreciation of it—an urging of the superiority of modern ideas. This demand for a practical illustration of results was rather embarrassing. He hesitated.

‘You tell me you have found that to be

your son Evelyn's disposition?' she calmly interrogated. 'You give me to understand that, with him, no motive is so powerful as self-interest—that he will do anything, however unwillingly, sooner than lose his inheritance?'

'I can't exactly say that--no,' was the chagrined answer. 'But that is just what I complain of. With any ordinary man it would answer perfectly, it must! With any healthy, rational disposition. Your son Tom, for instance; dock his allowance, I'd undertake to drive him with no other curb. But Evelyn—such an unfortunate, dogged, obstinate young rebel! I grow warm, and you must excuse me, Mrs. Saxon, but this is a subject that touches me nearly. Why, modern people seem to me to have the most contorted ideas. Self-interest, you talk of, as if that were such an ignoble thing. I deny it. A man is bound to take an interest in himself, a proper pride

in his position. Doesn't disinheritance mean disgrace? Tell me that. Of course it does. A man's father doesn't cast him off for nothing, and it is a stigma he will carry to his grave. The young man who is not influenced by such a threat is abnormal, unnatural, I say.'

Mrs. Saxon was silent for some minutes, finding herself in the puzzling position of having so much to say in answer to this strange doctrine, that she scarcely knew where to begin. At last she decided that, as Mr. Westmorland had evidently some definite sore point which occupied all his thoughts, while she was arguing merely on general grounds, it might be as well to find out more of his grievance, if possible.

'Is there, then, some definite request of yours which the Major has refused?' asked she.

'There is,' was the brief answer.

‘I am very sorry to hear it.’

Mr. Westmorland fidgetted about in an uneasy silence for a few minutes, while the carriage bowled swiftly on through the somewhat uneventful country round Norchester. At last,

‘I know you like frankness,’ he said, ‘and I may as well tell you what it is. You will scarcely think the one demand I make of my only son unreasonable, I think. I ask him to marry ; merely that. I do not say, marry this lady, or that lady. I do not limit his choice in any way. I simply ask him to do his obvious duty as sole representative of a very old family. There you have my trouble.’

‘Does Major Westmorland decline to marry?’

‘Absolutely.’

‘Giving no reasons?’

‘Merely that of disinclination.’

The lady mused a moment or so.



‘Does he give you to understand that he intends never to change his mind?’

‘Well, no, hardly that, but——’

‘Oh, then of course it is only a question of time,’ she broke in, with a relieved smile.

‘You cannot expect a young man to settle at any exactly given date, can you?’

Her guest winced, reddened, and paled. In his eye shone an uneasy gleam. Watching him she wondered what lay under the surface. She was satisfied that she had not heard all.

‘I think my son has had rope enough, Mrs. Saxon. Had I insisted on his marrying ten years ago, it might have been arbitrary; but now! He is past thirty, and I have been very patient——’

‘Could you not be patient a little longer? I can only imagine one thing likely to hinder a young man of your son’s age and position from marrying——’

‘And that is?’

‘To be repeatedly urged to do it. That is a natural perversity which you cannot help. He may be quite unconscious of it himself, yet it is pretty certain that, if he thought you would much rather he did *not* marry, he would be irresistibly impelled to do so.’

‘Do you really think that?’ eagerly, feverishly asked he.

‘I do indeed. Give him to understand that you are not so anxious as you were, that you think perhaps he had better hesitate before committing himself. It will be a work of time, perhaps, but it is not necessary, I suppose, that he should marry this year or next.’

‘Ah, but it is!’ burst from Mr. Westmorland, before he had time to command himself. ‘That is to say,’ he subjoined, nervously and hurriedly, ‘I am an old man, I have a—a curious presentiment. I want to live to see my daughter-in-law; to see

my grandson, if Heaven so will; to be sure that the line will not end in Evelyn.'

'But you are not so stricken in years, Mr. Westmorland! Come! you can scarcely urge that plea. No, no, be comforted, all will go well. In his own good time your son will take a wife, if he is let alone. But, if you continue to urge him, you may drive him into a celibacy which, in after years, he will deeply regret. Don't you see that?'

He did not answer, but by a melancholy shake of the head. He dare not tell of the superstitious terrors with which he was overwhelmed. Time! Time was slipping away with a swiftness which made him frantic. Each passing day he longed to seize, and passionately hold it fast, till Evelyn had wrung from it all the opportunities which lay dormant in its sweet summer hours. Yet day after day was he compelled to see wasted, and escaping

from his powerless hands; and the year was rolling on to its end, to the dawn of that fateful year that was coming. Every now and then a paroxysm of vague terror shook him. The mania had been too long indulged. A practised doctor might have seen the dawn of incipient madness in the contracted brow and gleaming eye. Mrs. Saxon was really puzzled, she could not account for this morbid anxiety to see his son married. It must be a fad, she thought, simply a manifestation of that desire to absolutely dictate the future of their children which, in some parents, really amounts to mania. She could imagine that the Major might be annoying. There was a dogged silence about him, which would be pretty sure to grate on the nerves of a sensitive, irritable being like his father. On the other hand, the urging and goading, the perpetual fret caused by the paternal want of discrimination, was

likely even to create that crust of obstinacy, certainly to increase it where it already existed. The hostess had been, to own the secret truth, a little disappointed in her younger guest, she had not thought him improved. Her remembrance of him was undoubtedly not the monosyllabic, impracticable, taciturn man he now appeared. She was now beginning to think that she had accidentally hit upon the key to the puzzle. Doubtless he was mortally afraid of Hope and Muriel, looking on both as hypothetical wives, and therefore certain foes. The situation was really rather an amusing one ! Mrs. Saxon felt guiltily inclined to laugh outright, but refrained, for fear of hurting the feelings of her companion, who certainly looked as if it were no laughing matter.

They were bowling up the avenue at Duffield by now, and just in sight of the wide lawn gaily sprinkled with parti-

coloured gowns and sable clerics, and here and there with a youth in tennis-attire, forming the nucleus of a bevy of fair ones.

‘Are we arrived?’ said Mr. Westmorland. ‘I need not, I know, remind you that what I have said is in the strictest confidence.’

‘Of course,’ said she, simply, as she prepared to alight; ‘we will discuss the subject fully on some future occasion—we have not nearly exhausted it.’

‘Ah! Our young people are just behind,’ said Mr. Westmorland, lifting his eyeglass to survey the approaching dog-cart. ‘And that son of mine prefers morosely riding by himself to being in the society of two of the most charming girls I have ever met. Did you ever know such folly? Is not my vexation natural?’

‘I cannot help confessing that I think his folly is natural: you really ought to know better than to make him so lament-

ably self-conscious, you know. But let us hope it will wear off as they know each other better.'

One large, limpid pair of eyes, from the many feminine pairs assembled on the lawn, watched with intense interest the arrival of the Hesselburgh party.

Leo Forde, slim and tall, balancing her racquet in her slender fingers, was awaiting the next hour or two in painful suspense. Dick was not present. He was in charge of two critical cases, and could not make his appearance till late in the day. Now, would Major Westmorland recognise her? That was the great, the thrilling question!

Yesterday he had, apparently, never looked at her. He had lunched hastily, and escaped to the surgery to talk business with Richard. Would he, to-day, entirely ignore her? Leo was mischievously determined to try the experiment by

putting herself decisively in his way. Not that she wanted to talk to him—ill-mannered, ill-tempered man that he was—but that she longed—oh, how she longed! to be introduced to the Saxons.



## CHAPTER IX.

## MR. WESTMORLAND'S HOPES RISE.

I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,  
 Not one, as he sits on the tree ;  
 The bells cannot ring it, but long years, O bring it !  
 Such as I wish it to be.

JEAN INGELow.

THE Hesselburgh party advanced into the gardens with cruel tardiness. It really was hateful of them to be so long saluting the host and hostess, introducing their guests—absolutely stopping to admire the archery prizes spread out on a table near !

Some one else besides Leo was minutely observing their progress ; Mrs. Hancock, in the celebrated purple sprigged gown,

with purple complexion to match, and bright pink bonnet-strings. She was sitting enthroned under the big plane-tree, the terror of all the youths and maidens present, who had by common consent removed themselves to a safe distance ; with the one exception of Miss Forde, who, as is known, always dared the lady to do her worst.

The girl was standing purposely within earshot, and soon had the satisfaction of hearing a few comments.

‘ Gracious ! Is that Mrs. Saxon or her son in the short hair, the sailor-hat, and the shirt-front ? Oh, that’s the lady ; is it ? Looks rather as if nature had made a mistake.’

‘ One always meets such a very—ahem ! —*inclusive* set at Duffield,’ rejoined Mrs. Shorthouse, with polite venom.

This lady’s husband had only last year been promoted to the honour and glory of

the Residence. She had spent the required three months in Norchester, and Mrs. Saxon had not called upon her. Consequently Mrs. Hancock had a congenial listener.

‘What *are* the Saxons? In trade, I hear,’ she went on, with assumed indifference.

‘Oh, that matters nothing now-a-days. I hear that the daughter of a pork-butcher was lately selected, out of many candidates, as a governess for royalty,’ vindictively said the lady of the sprigged foulard.

‘Indeed! It is not so in our family,’ with a sigh of satisfaction. ‘Nothing of that sort tolerated at Castle Tully.’

Mrs. Shorthouse was the daughter of an Irish lawyer who had been knighted.

‘I assure you I hear that in London those Saxons are received everywhere,’ pursued Mrs. Hancock.

‘That can be easily believed. London

is a sort of *pot-pourri* now-a-days, where wealth is always sure of a footing. The county is the only place where the distinctions of rank are at all preserved.'

Leo could bear it no longer. She turned away from the two speakers, divided between anger and amusement.

'Yes,' she thought, 'it is good manners, not good birth, that the Londoners admire, I believe. It is only here in Norchester that you may be as insolent as you please, provided you know who your great-grandfather was.'

She looked up suddenly, to find herself face to face with her visitor of yesterday.

Evelyn remembered her at once. He was in his heart, now that he had unburdened himself to Richard, rather ashamed of his conduct to Richard's sister. He bowed and shook hands, full of eagerness to introduce her and her brother to his father and the Saxons. Tom was close at

his heels, so this introduction was at once accomplished, to the great glee of the heir of Hesselburgh, who at once took entire possession of the doctor's sister, and swept her off to tennis before the deliberate Major had found a pause in which to ask her if her brother were there.

‘You know,’ said Tom, confidentially, ‘I have been wanting to know you ever since we came down.’

‘Have you?’ said Leo, smiling, as they walked side by side over the sunny grass. ‘And I have wanted to know your sister and you; you both look different from the Norchester people.’

‘That’s odd. Just what we thought about you. My mother was coming to call upon you, but now I can introduce you to her after this sett.’

Mrs. Hancock and Mrs. Shorthouse exchanged glances of terrible meaning, as they watched the introduction and its

sequel. But the sole comment made by the former lady was,

‘I thought so! Birds of a feather flock together.’

‘The gentleman who introduced them is a distinguished-looking man—a stranger, is he not?’ said Mrs. Shorthouse, eyeing Evelyn’s soldierly figure with approval.

‘One of the house-party. They have a better-looking set than usual,’ said Mrs. Hancock, condescendingly, with an eye on Miss Merrion’s slim figure.

Hope was watching all that went forward with interest. Country garden-parties were always an amusement to her; there was a subtle delight in proving the force of the nameless power she seemed to exert over the other sex. Muriel and she differed widely here. Miss Saxon, as became the daughter of such a very democratic mother, was decidedly lofty and exclusive in her ideas. Towards those she

considered her equals her manners were very simple and unassuming ; but here, in a 'Norchester crowd,' she was silent and unbending, and most of the gentlemen were afraid to approach her. But round Hope they clustered like wasps round a honey-pot. One brought ices, another lemonade, a third held her parasol when she partook of these refreshments, while the rest formed an audience around, ready to obey her lightest behest.

'Who is the very beautiful young lady who came with you?' asked Leo of Tom, 'the one talking to all those people over there?'

'That? Hope Merrion, the very nicest—I mean, one of the very nicest girls in the world.'

'How much everybody seems to admire her!' said Leo, regarding her attentively in a pause of the game. 'I don't wonder. She has such a sweet little face.'

‘Such a chin, hasn’t she? It’s the chin does it,’ said Tom, sagely. ‘There isn’t a man alive who could resist that chin.’

Evelyn’s father was thinking the same thing. He was annoyed, almost beyond his powers of concealment, by noting that the Major was, with few exceptions, the only young man absent from the charmed circle. A sett of tennis was formed. One of the retinue ran off to the house to get Hope’s racquet, and then they moved away, down to the tennis-lawn, and Mr. Westmorland followed them.

Again, as he watched her playing, surged up in his heart the desire to be young once more; to make that girl love him, to carry her off under the noses of a dozen rivals. Oh, why, why would not Evelyn do it for him?

His satisfied eye rested with delight on her every movement, his ear revelled in each cadence of her harmonious young



voice. She never flirted, never made use of her eyes, never made any effort of any kind to attract. She was quite natural and unaffected, looking frankly, answering clearly, enjoying her game with the zest of a school-girl.

‘If I had fallen across such a woman when I was young,’ he thought to himself, ‘it would have made a different man of me. Girls have so much more in their minds, and consequently in their faces, than they used to have. One would never tire of such a woman as that. I tired of my wife. She had a strong will, but a weak intellect. In spite of her fortune I did wrong to marry her, and my punishment takes the form of my son!’

He looked resentfully round for Evelyn, and met his eyes, full. The Major approached, with an air of light-heartedness worn to conceal inward anxiety. His father was standing on the grass; the

grass was damp, a cold was the inevitable result, to him, of such imprudence, but nothing infuriated him more than the merest hint in this direction. Any word which recalled, however distantly, the disabilities of advancing years, was gall and wormwood to the elderly beau. Evelyn knew this, and all his energies were at the moment centred on stratagem.

‘There’s a scarlet *datura* in the conservatory, ’tis worth seeing,’ he suggested, confidentially.

‘Scarlet *datura* be hanged!’ was the acrimonious reply; ‘here is something better worth seeing on this lawn, as you would know, if you possessed all your faculties. Look at the young lady, Miss Hope! There is grace in all her movements, grace that springs from a soul within! What a glance! what a smile! Look at that mouth! Is it solely for the purpose

of exasperating me that you decline to speak to her?’

‘Come a little further off, and I will answer; we might be overheard, just here,’ said the wily Evelyn, thinking little of the point of discussion, and greatly of his father’s rheumatism.

‘Overheard! when you mumble so that I can hardly hear you myself,’ was the irritable rejoinder. ‘No, thanks: I stay here. One does not have the chance, every day, of looking at beauty like that.’

‘I’m sorry I can’t agree with you,’ said his son, sulkily.

‘Agree with me! Have you ever agreed with me, on any point, ever since you were born?’ sneered Mr. Westmorland. ‘No, no! The days are gone by, so Mrs. Saxon tells me, when a father may hope to transmit a mere fraction of his individuality to the son who is to reign after him. You

and I are quite in the fashion. I believe we differ on everything.'

'I'm afraid that's somewhere near true,' said Evelyn, hopelessly. 'But let us stroll; the wind is chilly.'

'The wind? I feel no wind! You are talking nonsense; but do you really mean that you actually are incapable of seeing that Miss Merrion is, beyond question, a person to be admired?'

'I don't like her,' was the dogged answer. 'I will go further if you please, and add that I actually dislike her. I am indifferent about most people, but I dislike Miss Merrion.'

'That is as might have been expected,' returned his father, smoothly, after a pause; 'and for no reason, I suppose, beyond the all-sufficient one that I think otherwise?'

'I have a reason, and it's a jolly strong one,' said the Major inelegantly; 'but I expect it would be mean to put it about.'

I shall say nothing, but it is sure to come out sooner or later. If you knew, I think even your admiration would cool; but meantime you may understand I would sooner drown myself than ask such a woman to be my wife; and the sooner you make arrangements to get out of this, the better I shall be pleased, that's all.'

'Amazing!' was his bewildered father's rejoinder, spoken in soliloquy; for Evelyn was off, to secure Mrs. Saxon's influence to induce a removal from the dangerous grass.

'As it happens, I am just in want of him,' said the vigorous lady. 'I am meditating an attack on the wife of the canon in residence. Your father will be a good bait.'

Mrs. Shorthouse was still seated on the green bench beside Mrs. Hancock, when the two advanced upon her. What was about to happen? Every spine of the

artificial rye in her bonnet quivered with suspense.

‘Mrs. Shorthouse, I believe? Will you allow me to introduce myself? I am Mrs. Saxon. I have been looking for an opportunity to make your acquaintance, but in the summer I am a bad caller. I wonder if you would so far waive the formalities as to give us the pleasure of your company at dinner at Hesselburgh?’

Excitement made Mrs. Shorthouse positively purple. She was obliged to clear her throat before answering, and found herself, with a weak smile, murmuring something about ‘most happy,’ regardless of the start and snort of the purple-sprigged foulard at her side.

‘I am so anxious to meet Canon Shorthouse,’ went on Mrs. Saxon, using to its fullest effect the one personal charm which she possessed—a melodious voice and most refined manner of speaking. ‘I hear he

is an antiquary, so I felt sure he would like to meet Mr. Westmorland. Let me introduce Mr. Westmorland—a very old friend. He is staying with us, and I want to get up a small dinner-party, but will not fix the date until I know your engagements.’

The enemy was completely disarmed. The invader took the vacant seat on the green bench, Mr. Westmorland contributed a few courtly nothings, a date was fixed, and Mrs. Saxon could feel that she had done her duty and just saved her unaccountable neglect of the Shorthouses from being any longer the theme of every tea-party of the cathedral clique.

‘The etiquette of this place is too much for me,’ she remarked, with a sigh, as they moved off. ‘I generally have to get little Mrs. Copeland to help me arrange my table. She knows the ins and outs of things. Once upon a time I got into terrible trouble. I put Major Dickens

above Captain Harris, a naval captain. I thought that must be right, but the Harris's cut us afterwards, and I discovered that his father was a baron! Dire, was it not? Mrs. Copeland, I believe, knows all the pedigrees. Her husband is Athelstan's agent, so she is a great comfort. Until we came to Hesselburgh, I fancied such things belonged to the Jane Austen period, but *experientia docet!*

Tom came dancing up.

'I say, *mater*, haven't you got an aboriginal dinner coming off next week? Well, invite Miss Forde and her brother, just to take the taste out—won't you? She's such a stunning little thing, I want to introduce her. You know,'—with a laugh to Mr. Westmorland—'the Major went to lunch with her on his way up to Hesselburgh yesterday. And I'm not surprised, I tell you.'

Mr. Westmorland's whole face changed



suddenly, lighted up, became radiant.

‘Eh?—eh?’ he exclaimed, genially. ‘What’s that you say? Miss Forde? Pretty, is she? I crave the honour of an introduction! Where is she?’

‘She’s sitting on that seat, over there—that slim girl in pink,’ said Tom, eagerly.

Mr. Westmorland’s glasses went up, and he critically surveyed the pliant, graceful form of Leo, sunk back with a pretty touch of lassitude in a big wicker-chair. The glowing, hopeful youth in her was most attractive. A different style from Miss Merrion: more rudimentary, but in its way quite as attractive.

‘Just the creature to fascinate a morose clod like Evelyn,’ reflected the fond parent. ‘I shall certainly not complain, if this be his choice.’

The gloom which had rested on his spirits was all gone. He thought he understood his son at last. Ah, how much

now hung upon his own discretion ! He made a heroic resolve. No hint of what he knew should cross his lips. He would not interfere—would not spoil the sport. Evelyn, for once, should positively be allowed to do his own wooing. But, meanwhile, to speak to this blythe young divinity—to ascertain if the sound of her was as satisfactory as the sight of her :

‘ A nymph—a positive nymph ! ’ he said to Tom. ‘ I must be presented at once.’

## CHAPTER X.

MOLLIE.

Seigneur, préservez-moi—préservez ceux que j'aime,  
 Parents, amis, et mes ennemis même  
 Dans le mal triomphant,  
 De jamais voir, seigneur, l'été sans fleurs vermeilles,  
 Le cage sans oiseau, la rûche sans abeilles,  
 La maison sans enfants !

VICTOR HUGO.

“AND so, Miss Forde, you keep house for your brother, I hear?” said the handsome old man, seating himself by Leo. ‘Poor fellow, how I pity him !’

‘You are not very polite,’ laughed Leo.

‘Ah ! but you don’t hear me out. You don’t ask why he is to be pitied. Now I’ll

tell you : because he will be so soon called upon to lose you. Eh ?

She really did not understand him.

‘ I am not going away,’ she said.

‘ Ah ! ah ! Don’t be too positive, my child—not in this world ! How do you know that somebody else’s brother may not want his house kept—eh ? We all know how weak are the claims of one’s own brothers, compared with those of other people. Isn’t that so ?’

She blushed beautifully.

‘ Oh, but I could never leave Dick !’

‘ Quite so—quite so ! The only way to solve that would be to make Dick give you away, would it not ? And so my boy lunched with you yesterday, I hear ?’

‘ You are very like him,’ remarked Leo, raising her limpid eyes to his face.

‘ Like him, am I ? What, a poor hand at compliments—eh ? Dear ! what a pair of us ! And he is a friend of Dick’s ?’

‘Yes, Dick likes him very much,’ said Leo, sorely tempted to add that she did not at all agree with Dick on this point; but politeness, of course, forbade such uncomplimentary frankness, and Mr. Westmorland smiled on in happy ignorance of the methods of rendering himself agreeable employed by Evelyn yesterday.

‘And how do you like this house-keeping—eh, Miss Forde?’

‘I like it very much. It is great fun. I like living with Dick, and Norchester is such a queer place. I mean, the people are so queer: there is something to make you laugh all day long. Do you see that very stout lady in the purple gown all over little bunches of flowers? She is the funniest of all. She thinks I am a very naughty girl, but I can’t help it. She says young ladies ought not to do all kinds of things which seem very harmless to Dick and me; but I was not made on

her pattern. I was cut out differently, and, if anyone tried to alter me now, I am afraid they would only spoil me or pull me out of shape. What do you think?’

‘That you are a young lady of much penetration. Do not let the purple lady metamorphose you in any way. Be yourself, and you cannot fail to please.’

‘Why, here comes Dick,’ said Leo, frankly, ‘with Major Westmorland! I did not know that Dick had arrived on the scene.’

Evelyn’s father looked up, and saw his son approaching with evident and eager intention of introducing him to the sensible-looking, square-shouldered young man who accompanied him. Actually there was a smile on the Major’s usually serious countenance—he looked positively animated. His father could scarcely believe his eyes. High beat his heart, rosy grew the world’s aspect to him. There

could be but one reason for Evelyn's eagerness to come to Hesselburgh, for his excursion to Minstergate yesterday, for his sociability to-day! But one reason: the pretty, *naïve* one now seated at his side. How could he guess that the medical brother, and not the attractive sister, had been the lure? Had such a reason been given him, he could not have understood it. In his eyes, when young men became in the least 'keen' about anything, or when any part of their conduct seemed in the slightest degree unexplained, there was always a woman in the background. One strong reason for his disquietude about his heir's non-matrimonial tendencies had been the fear of some discreditable attachment behind the scenes—some entanglement which he was too obstinate to confess. So little could he understand even the broad lines of the character of his only son!

But now the answer to the whole conundrum was before him ; and such a pleasing answer ! He could have embraced Leo ; he felt he loved her. Vague ideas of presenting her with jewellery floated through his mind, so perfectly competent did he feel himself to conduct all the details of this wooing which his son, if left to himself, was sure to spoil by some piece of incredible folly, backwardness, or bashfulness.

However, he had made a covenant with himself that Evelyn should at least attempt the siege on his own account ; and, determined to adhere to this noble resolution, he made his smile not too broad as the young man said :

‘ Father, I am anxious you should know my friend Forde.’

‘ Having had the honour of being already presented to Miss Forde, it will be readily understood that the idea of knowing any of her family gives me the greatest pleas-



ure,' he said, in his pleasant, half-ironical tones.

Leo admired him intensely, and thought his manners like those of Sir Walter Elliot in 'Persuasion,' with a dash of the benevolence of Mr. Woodhouse in 'Emma.'

A few words passed, explanatory of the former acquaintance of the young men, and then the doctor deliberately took his seat at Mr. Westmorland's side and asked him if he were interested in the report of the medical congress published in that morning's *Times*.

Mr. Westmorland was a great newspaper reader, and ready to discuss any current topic of the day. They fell into conversation in the most promising way, and Evelyn, exulting in his own diplomacy, was just wondering how to make himself scarce when his eye fell on Leo. The brilliant thought of asking her to play tennis struck him; he owed her some reparation for his

rudeness of yesterday, and it would leave the coast clear for Dick.

The young lady accepted somewhat haughtily, recent slights being fresh in her mind. Mr. Westmorland had much ado to conceal his surprise and delight on seeing them walk off together.

‘Charming young creature! charming! Your sister, sir,’ he could not refrain from saying. ‘Young ladies are so charming now-a-days, a higher form of organism altogether, than they used to be. Every feeling alive, every faculty trained. Educated, body and mind, literature, and the gymnasium! It makes their charms more subtle, and more potent.’

‘Yes,’ said Dick, ‘I think it does. Seriously, I believe that an English girl of to-day has the chance of being about as complete a being as has been yet known, if she understands how to use her opportunities.’

His eyes were on Muriel Saxon, who was seated near, talking languidly to an uninteresting minor canon whose one topic was church music.

‘I think,’ he went on, ‘that, in our days, fine health adds to a girl’s beauty. It is the gymnasium, as you say, sir. The time has gone by, when a faded aspect and a tottering step were the great attractions. Look at Miss Saxon now, a case in point. Feminine and graceful! But you should have seen her playing in the tennis-tournament; accurate eye, steady wrist! It’s a beautiful combination!’

Mr. Westmorland assented, with a sigh.

‘It’s a daily wonder to me,’ he said, ‘how any of you young men keep single, in face of such temptation.’

The young doctor replied, with his eyes still on Miss Saxon,

‘Young ladies are more particular, now-a-days, you know.’

‘ Ah !’ agreed his companion, with a sudden access of apprehension.

That was very likely so, and it frightened him, for he was totally unable to see in what possible way his son could render himself attractive to a girl of the type under discussion. He looked across the gardens. Evelyn and Leo were playing together. The now sinking sun threw their shadows long on the golden grass behind them. The ball rose dark into the clear atmosphere, hovered against a background of amber sky, and fell. Leo tried, missed it, stooped and cried ‘ Take it !’ to Evelyn, who, playing delicately over her head, ‘ placed ’ the ball too successfully for his adversary, and Miss Forde triumphantly announced,

‘ Our game !’

‘ One love, love one !’ remarked Evelyn, tossing the balls into the other courts.

‘ The language of tennis sounds some-

what suggestive to an outsider,' smiled his father.

Dick laughed.

'That subject has been worn threadbare, I am afraid,' he said; and leaned back, looking at Muriel and feeling the calm of the summer evening in his soul.

'The Major is a fine soldier,' he remarked, presently, letting his gaze travel to Evelyn's stalwart figure.

'Ay, a good soldier, but a bad lover,' said Mr. Westmorland, though with more approval in his tones than was usual with him when speaking of his thorn in the flesh. 'Why doesn't he marry now?'

Dick saw his chance.

'I suppose, with such a fine estate, his marriage is a matter of some importance,' he said, with a professional eye upon his patient.

'Eh?' said Mr. Westmorland, dreamily, shading his eyes from the dazzle. 'Oh,

he must take his time, you know, he must take his time about that. He'll come to it, sooner or later. They all come to it. No use to be in a hurry.'

This was most amazing. For a minute Dick was stupefied. Westmorland had said to him,

'You have only to touch the sore point, ever so distantly, and you will see the cloven hoof.'

He could not understand it. Of the combined effects of Mrs. Saxon's advice that afternoon, and Leo's appearance on the scene, he could of course know nothing. The result was extremely perplexing. It almost seemed as if it were after all the son, and not the father, who laboured under a mental disorder.

'What was Westmorland thinking about?' he wondered, perplexedly, 'what a queer fellow he is!'

And then his thoughts wandered grad-

ually away from the old man at his side, back to Muriel Saxon; and there eyes, brain, and heart rested, long and steadily, till the longing grew too great to be further repressed, and, turning to Mr. Westmorland, he asked, in a straightforward, manly way,

‘Would you introduce me to Miss Saxon? I should esteem it a great favour.’

‘Certainly—oh, certainly!’ No civility could be reckoned too great to show to Leo’s brother. They rose, and walked together over the sunny lawn.

Muriel saw them coming, and advanced to meet them. She was but too glad to escape from the minor canon, and favoured Richard with a slow, sweet smile, not the conventional one which she reserved for the Norchester natives.

A few common-places passed between the trio: at least, to Mr. Westmorland they

were common-places. Forde, however, was standing at Heaven's gate, and the monotonous cadence of Miss Saxon's flute-like voice was to him the harmony of angels; for the young doctor was in love, for the first time, and had taken the complaint severely. Muriel, studying him, thought that he seemed handsomer than her previous casual sights of him had led her to suppose. She was wrong. The fact was, that he really had grown handsomer than formerly: a new light beamed in his steady eyes, and a softness relaxed the sensible lines of his mouth. This garden was the garden of Eden, and life took on new hues of beauty and variety.

Suddenly Muriel broke into a small remark of Mr. Westmorland's with a slight exclamation of pleasure, her face kindled up, and Richard turned to follow the direction of her eyes. He saw Mrs. Saxon advancing towards them, a broad smile of pleasure



on her large features, and beside her a little, shrivelled-looking elderly gentleman in a grey felt wide-awake and spectacles, and carrying a large white umbrella, lined with green.

‘Cousin Mollie!’ said Muriel, a great deal of delight infused into her soft tones; and, if ever the doctor envied anybody in his life, it was the quaint little gentleman in blue spectacles, as Miss Saxon took his brown paw in both her hands, and said, with as much emphasis as her nature admitted of,

‘I’m simply delighted to see you, dear!’

The gentleman so addressed seemed fully as happy as she in the meeting. He smiled and nodded, and let her hold his hand, and presently said, in a funny little cracked voice,

‘Yes, I came over, came over to-day. Thought it was time I saw something of you all! Thomas saw me first! He

grows a fine boy, doesn't he? Clapped me on the back till he made me cough, Murie! Plenty of muscle, eh? Plenty! He'll turn Leaming out of windows, when he's master there, eh?' and the genial little man laughed till the tears came, and brought out a large crimson handkerchief which he applied to his forehead.

Meanwhile the said Thomas was ravaging the gardens like a whirlwind in search of Hope; he found her in one of the palm-houses, making havoc of the heart of a susceptible deacon from a neighbouring church, who glared savagely at the intruder.

Naught cared Tom; he unceremoniously caught Miss Merrion's hand, snatched up her parasol, and panted out, 'in short, quick gasps,

'Come on . . . quick! . . . Cousin . . . Mollie's . . . turned up! . . . Come on, I tell you!'

She uttered a little cry of gladness.

‘Oh, Tom, how nice! You didn’t expect him, did you? Excuse me, please,’ to the offended cleric, ‘I must run away at once!’ and, so saying, they were off.

Cousin Mollie, otherwise the Honourable Molyneux Lyster, was the embodiment, to the young Saxons, of everything that was delightful, and undisciplined, and ideal. He lived all alone, in the very heart of the moors, on a small estate which had been left him by a distant relation. He was a junior member of a titled family, and years ago had buried every hope in the grave of his young wife. Just one year of married happiness had been his, and then he laid her to rest, with their tiny son on her breast, in the lonely churchyard of Leaming-le-Moor. The unexpected legacy of the manor had enabled him to marry this, his first and only love; when she died,

all his youth, his aspirations, his very life seemed crushed out of him. He lived on, his lonely days, in his isolated home, caring for nobody, interested in nothing save his weekly visit to the churchyard where his heart and treasure lay together, and his Sunday church-going, when he could look at the marble monument he had caused to be erected to their memory.

He had existed in this morbid way for about ten years when his second cousin, Athelstan Saxon, married, and brought his bride, in the course of honeymoon wanderings, to stop a night in the moorland manor.

Mrs. Saxon was at once touched with deepest pity of the forlorn condition of the widower; but her vigorous, and perhaps too straightforward hand, was powerless to break the crust of chillness and apathy which hid the genial heart. She could not forget him, however, and never let a year

go by without making a fruitless effort to coax him out of his solitude.

At last she hit, almost by accident, on the spring which unlocked his heart. After four years, and when Muriel was nearly three years old, Master Tom appeared on the scenes. She wrote and asked Mr. Lyster to be godfather.

To her great astonishment, he consented; nay, still more wondrous, he came to Hesselburgh for the baptism. He brought silver gifts of the most sumptuous description for Thomas Molyneux Lyster Saxon. He was enchanted with the little brown baby, and held it on his knees, seemingly spell-bound as it unconsciously clasped his finger in its velvety touch; he was almost equally delighted with the little golden-haired Muriel, who came and nestled against his knee, half-jealous of the consequence and state of the new baby brother.

The prematurely old and bowed figure of the recluse, was to be seen moving round the garden with the bonny girl in his arms, who plucked flowers, and tried with gravity and much labour to fasten them in his coat. He seemed lost in a dream of bliss when she cuddled his neck—so long unused to the divine touches of love—with her fat white arms.

Mrs. Saxon went out to him after a while, and courteously begged that he would not tease himself too much with the child. He tightened his clasp about her, and bright drops swam in his eyes, as he said, wistfully,

‘Don’t take her from me; she’s—she’s quite happy, I believe; she don’t want to leave Mollie, do you, little woman?’

‘Don’t want to leave Mollie,’ echoed the little one, jovially; whereupon he timidly kissed her, and she returned his kisses with interest. He looked so exceedingly

funny, decked out to Muriel's taste, with dandelions waving in his hat, and a daisy-chain about his neck ; altogether so Ophelia-like in appearance that Mrs. Saxon felt inclined to laugh and cry both at once.

She did cry in earnest before the day was out. After dinner, and only one cigar, the confirmed smoker begged permission to go and see the children in bed. Mr. Saxon took him there, unknown to his wife, who, proceeding to the nursery half-an-hour later, found her visitor seated by Tom's cradle, embracing the head of it, and gazing rapt at the sleeping baby. He looked up, as she entered, with a quivering, appealing smile.

‘I'm not disturbing him,’ he said, pleadingly. ‘He's sound asleep. You see, it makes me think so of my own little chap—how he might have looked in his sleep. He is so warm, this little fellow—alive and warm ; I never kissed mine till he was

cold ;' and then two great tears from the desolate father's eyes fell audibly on little Tom's blue-silk quilt. 'I feel as if I couldn't bear to leave him,' he said, sobbingly.

The usually unemotional woman knelt down and kissed the worn, quivering face.

'The boy is partly yours,' she said, weeping ; 'you shall always see as much of him as ever you please. Our home is open to you whenever you care to come, and your room shall always be ready.'

So it had been ever since. The next year both children went, with their nurses, to stay at Leaming while their parents were abroad ; and after this, a visit from them, once a year, became a settled thing. The old grey, solitary house echoed children's shouts and children's laughter, as years ago the young husband and wife had, with tender smiles and beating hearts,



hoped that it would. One of Muriel's earliest recollections was of being held up in Cousin Mollie's arms to kiss the marble lips of the monumental mother, who, with her baby in her arms, was stepping bare-foot into the waves of a marble ocean.

What cared these two healthy and jocund young persons for sad memories or sacred associations? They romped and quarrelled, played and enjoyed themselves more blithely in the old house on the moors than anywhere else in the world.

Hope had often heard of this beloved Cousin Mollie, but had never beheld him. Thus it was that his sudden arrival on the scene was to her quite as exciting as it was to Tom, and she ran over the smooth lawns in undignified haste that was most shocking to Mrs. Hancock.

## CHAPTER XI.

I WANT TO TAKE YOU ALL BACK WITH ME.

And to the lone recluse, whate'er  
They brought—each visiting  
Was like the crowding of the year  
With a new burst of spring'

WORDSWORTH.

'Ah, here he comes! Where was he off to?' said Mr. Lyster, in tones of great satisfaction, as Tom and Hope came up.

'I went to fetch Miss Merrion, you know; I've told you about her in letters,' said Tom, panting. 'I want to introduce you.'

Perhaps Hope was a little disappointed in Cousin Mollie's outward man. She

knew his romance, of course, but it was hard to connect romance with the little smiling, heated, ill-dressed gentleman before her. In his best days he could never have been handsome; and Hope as yet knew nothing of that love which absolutely creates beauty in the beloved object. There was, however, no resisting the shy cordiality of his manner; and, before she had been five minutes talking to him, she quite understood the devotion of the two young Saxons.

Very soon a move was made—the party must be making their farewells.

Richard, who had been quite crowded out by the sudden arrival of this popular person, was preparing to step back and retire when Mrs. Saxon stopped him and, to his untold delight, asked him to bring his sister to dinner on the following Wednesday. He accepted the invitation with a great fear lest his manner of doing so

had been too marked—too emphatic. Here was an unexpected pleasure—something to look forward to! The dazzle of the sinking sun turned all the world to glory.

Leo and Major Westmorland came across the grass together from their tennis: Evelyn was looking quite animated, and Leo's cheeks were like carnations.

'We won, Dick,' cried she, delightedly, 'we won!'

'A very good sett,' said the Major; 'your sister plays capitally, Forde.'

'She does indeed! Mr. Forde and I had the pleasure of watching her,' said Mr. Westmorland, hardly able to contain himself for delight.

'I do so like tennis,' said Leo, with all her heart, smiling up at her late partner, with whom she was now quite on friendly terms.

'If you could manage to send up an evening dress, you had better come in time

for some tennis on Wednesday,' said Mrs. Saxon.

The girl looked puzzled.

'Mrs. Saxon has asked me to bring you to dine at Hesselburgh,' explained her brother.

'Has she?' cried Leo. 'Oh, how *awfully* kind of her!'

Then, as the smile grew broader on all the faces round, she added, with a charming colour,

'I ought not to have said "awfully," ought I?'

'My dear,' said Mr. Westmorland, indulgently, 'some people may say anything they please.'

'You will turn my little girl's head, sir,' smiled Dick.

'I should like to turn it,' was the gallant response, 'so that it would always look in my direction.'

So saying, with a courtly bow, he took

leave, and followed the rest of the party.

‘You have enjoyed your afternoon, father,’ said Evelyn, giving him his arm.

‘I have enjoyed myself, Evelyn, very much, considerably more than I expected. Don’t know when I have had such a pleasant afternoon.’

There was no *tête-à-tête* between him and Mrs. Saxon on the way home, for the three young people turned their father out of the cart in order to have Mollie amongst them.

Perhaps it was as well; for, in Mr. Westmorland’s present elated state of mind, he must have spoken of Leo, and he did not wish to do so, not till he had made assurance doubly sure.

Meanwhile the cart was bowling swiftly along, Cousin Mollie driving, with Muriel at his side, Hope and Tom behind.

‘I suppose you know,’ he said, when all the horses and dogs at Leaming had been

duly enquired for, and the health of Mrs. Abbott, the house-keeper, ascertained to be excellent. 'I suppose you know what I came here for.'

'Oh, of course; to see me,' said Muriel.

'That, naturally, my darling, but not that only. I want to take you all back with me.'

'Hooray!' shouted Tom, causing the nervous mare to break into a gallop, and nearly shooting out Hope behind.

'Tom, you dreadful boy! You nearly killed me!' she cried.

'Well, you couldn't fall out, if you would allow me to put my arm round your waist as I am always offering to do.'

'Tom, don't be vulgar. Does Mr. Lyster mean to invite me too, to Leaming?'

'Of course he does; don't you, Mollie?'

'Most certainly, if Miss Hope cares to come; well, do you think it can be managed?'

‘No,’ said Muriel, mournfully, ‘I don’t think the *mater* will let us come, not to leave Major Westmorland.’

‘Oh, rubbish, Muriel!’ cried Tom. ‘He doesn’t count as a young one; he never comes near us, or joins in any way, he won’t even drive in the cart.’

‘Dear me, what an incomprehensible young man!’ said Cousin Mollie.

‘Well, I know *mater* won’t let us all go away and leave him,’ maintained Muriel. ‘Besides,’ she added, in melancholy tones, ‘there is this horrid Woman’s Sanitary League, we must be home for that.’

‘He’ll spoil all the fun! a great wet blanket!’ said Tom, angrily; ‘and, as to that Sanitary League, it’s a blooming nuisance.’

Poor Hope felt, like Jonah, inclined to entreat them to leave her out of the plan, and then the Major would join himself once more to their revels; yet pride forbade. Why should she exclude herself



from such simple, delightful pleasure, just because he chose to sulk? What did she care for his black looks and chilling silence?

‘Tom,’ said she, ‘let us put up with Major Westmorland’s vagaries rather than lose the chance of a visit to Leaming!’

‘Bless me,’ said Mollie, ‘he’ll be all right! Bound to be sociable when he finds himself shut up with you three young people. What do you say—hey? Let’s carry him off to our fastness on the moorland, and convert him by force into a good comrade, shall we?’

‘A very good idea!’ laughed Hope, softly.

‘I believe you want him to come,’ said Tom, sulkily. ‘I’m not going if you mean to leave me out in the cold.’

‘My dear, good boy,’ she said, mischievously, ‘I hardly think the Major shows much desire to compete for my society.’

You ought to bless him for his surliness. If he were charming, you know, I might—it is just barely possible that I *might*—prefer him to you.'

'Oh, false one! You'd better!' was the young man's fierce threat. 'Yes, Moll, old boy, have Westmorland; he'll just suit.'

'Perhaps he won't come,' suggested Muriel.

'I should think it's very likely,' said Hope.

'Then *mater* won't let us come; so do be very civil to him, all of you, so as to make him think we want him,' urged Muriel. 'I think, you know, that perhaps we three do clique too much, and make jokes that he doesn't understand. It's all right with Mollie, because he understands us—don't you, dear? But the Major doesn't, and I think we ought to be careful.'

It was so seldom that Miss Saxon delivered so lengthy an opinion that her audience were somewhat impressed, though of course too proud to show it; and a short silence ensued before Cousin Mollie remarked,

‘The Wetherells have been in trouble since last winter, you will be sorry to hear, Murie.’

‘Who are the Wetherells?’ asked Hope, in a low voice, of Tom.

‘Vicar and vicaress of Leaming-le-Moor,’ he replied. ‘Queer old pair. Sorry they’ve been up a tree, Mollie. What was it?’

‘You remember their niece?’

Muriel laughed in an amused way.

‘I should think so! We heard of her often, but never saw her. We always called her Jane Fairfax,’ she explained to Hope. ‘Do you remember how, whenever Emma Woodhouse called on the Bates’s, they always read Jane Fairfax’s last letter

out loud to her? Well, the Wetherells always did that. This beloved niece of theirs was governess in some wealthy family who were always travelling abroad.'

'The poor old dears thought that Nellie's account of her travels ought to be published,' laughed Tom. 'She wrote most awful long-winded stories of all that she had done and seen. She is a good sort of girl, I should think, but a most fearful bore.'

'She is dead, Tom,' said Cousin Mollie, sadly.

'Dead!' The boy's gaiety was sobered at once. 'Oh, I am so sorry,' he said, honestly. 'How fearfully rough on those poor old souls.'

'She was a good girl, and a brave girl,' said their cousin, 'dutiful and affectionate; and she was all they had to care for. I scarcely thought that Mrs. Wetherell would survive it. It was a pitiful thing.

Just after you two left me in January, they had a letter saying that the Fothergills were in England——'

Hope turned with a queer start, and bent her startled eyes on the narrator.

'The Fothergills were the people she travelled with,' said Tom, thinking she required an explanation.

'Just so,' went on Mr. Lyster; 'well, they were in England, and thought Nellie so poorly that they were sending her to her uncle and aunt for a long stay till she was quite recovered. When she came, about the middle of February, I was horrified at her wan looks. She seemed so strangely altered, changed, and broken down. She had a cough, too, that sounded ominous. I sent for Rider, from Liverpool——'

'Just like you,' murmured Muriel.

'My dearie, one did all one could. He seemed puzzled—said there was so little

vitality. There were the seeds of a decline, but no more than a healthy girl, in a pure mountain air, ought to throw off, with care; but there seemed no elasticity—no effort. I told him to come again in a month. Meanwhile, I sent her champagne, and such-like rubbish, and got her a horse, thinking that riding might be beneficial. But she seemed to have no energy for anything—riding, especially, seemed only to distress and exhaust her. The weather was bad, and gradually she kept the house more. When Rider next came, he was petrified—said he had never in his life seen the disease make such ravages in so short a time. Unless something gave her a fresh start, he said, nothing could save her. I suggested taking her away south, and he thought it a good idea; but nothing would persuade her to go. She said she felt happier there, and we thought it best to humour her; but she just faded

out of life quietly, and died on the 1st of May. It was very terrible to see her dying daily. She grew so weak that the slightest noise startled her like a cannon-shot. I have seen her spring up, and grow red and pale because the postman passed the window.'

'Poor Mr. and Mrs. Wetherell!' said Muriel, compassionately.

Hope looked away, over the corn-fields, that the occupants of the cart might not see that her eyes were brimming with tears. Her sympathies, it seemed, were easily stirred.

The story subdued all their spirits, and only quiet remarks concerning the dead girl and her loss were heard, until, in the early twilight, they drove into the stable-yard. The men came round in great pleasure, grinning to see Mr. Lyster, who had a genial little speech for all of them.

Just as they were alighted, the Major,

who had lingered for a little talk with Dick Forde, rode into the yard. His spirits were good, for his father's speech concerning his matrimonial arrangements had been repeated to him, and he was rejoicing over the happy change. He remained chatting in the dusk, after he had dismounted, watching Hope, who had pulled down some of the broad chestnut-leaf fans which hung over the red wall, and was decking Maidenhair's head with them. Tom, behind her, was tickling her neck with a straw, to try to make her laugh, and asking why she was in the dumps.

'I am thinking about that girl—that Nellie, who died, out on the moors,' she said. 'It has made me suddenly feel how terribly sad life is, Tom dear. And this is the time of day to feel sad, too. The sun is gone, the wind is hushed, everything is grey, sober, and dim. There is something depressing in the very ring of the men's



feet on the stones, in the clink of Jane's pans in the dairy, and the lowing of the cows, as if they were afraid of the dark. The colour has gone out of the sky and the trees; and it was so bright an hour ago. Our very voices echo sadly, and our faces look white. I know that soon the dressing-bell will ring, and we shall go indoors, and all the lamps will be lit, and the curtains drawn, and there will be clatter of plates and glass and silver, and comforting suggestions of dinner, and I shall laugh at myself; but now it is Borderland—neither to-day nor this evening, and I feel dreary, Tom—dreary.'

'Oh, my duckie, don't talk like that, or I shall want to hug you!' cried Tom, sympathetically, drawing her arm through his. 'Come along in—you are chilly.'

'Yes; but, Tom,' she said, hanging back, as if loth to join the trio in the gateway, 'wasn't it a sad story? I half wish I had

not heard it. Fancy dying like that, all alone, in that desolate place, just because you had nothing to live for: when you need not have died, only that death seemed easier than life. Oh, Tom dear, isn't that dreadful? I don't know what it can be like not to care to live.'

'Do you suppose she was not happy?' asked the boy, in an awe-struck way.

'Happy? Would a happy woman let her life slip through her fingers like that? Why, Tom, do you know, the craving for life, the mere animal instinct of self-preservation, is the *very last thing* one parts from! Think what she must have suffered before she gave it up!'

'Poor girl,' he said, touched and softened by his sunny Hope's unwonted earnestness.

'I feel,' said she, with a little shiver, as she moved onwards, 'I feel as if I want to go and see that girl's grave.'

## CHAPTER XII.

## LEO GOES INTO HIGH SOCIETY.

And that same voice, my soul hears, as a bird  
The fowler's note, and follows to the snare !

ROBERT BROWNING.

COUSIN MOLLIE did not carry his point without a struggle. Mrs. Saxon was not quite willing to have all the life swept out of the house just at this time. The neighbourhood was bristling with tennis-parties and picnics, and it seemed a pity for the young folks to miss all these. She scarcely knew what made them so wild to go.

‘For, after all,’ as she said to her hus-

band, 'it is dull there, you know. The shooting is good, no doubt, but they get as much as they want, here, and I am sure even Molyneux can scarcely allow them more liberty than we do. When they were children, it was easily understood; the wall-fruit, the bee-hives, the dining late, the general petting. But, now they are grown up, I should imagine the society round here had more charms; yet Tom seems perfectly ready to abandon even Miss Forde for the sake of a week at Leaming. One never gets to the bottom, even of one's own children.'

'It is old association, I expect,' said little Mr. Saxon, benignly. 'Going to stay with Molyneux has always been the greatest treat in their catalogue, and force of habit makes it so still. It seems a harmless taste, my dear, and I think we may safely encourage it.'

'I believe you are right, Athelstan, you

so often are, what should I do without you?' which praise the modest little man at once disclaimed, in his usual formula,

'What sense I have, I owe to my wife.'

'At any rate, they cannot go till after the dinner-party on Wednesday, and Molyneux must stay for that, and they must be back in time for the hygienic meeting,' was the lady's ultimatum.

Mollie had no objection. So completely had that ruling spirit, Thomas, dominated his nature, that the shy, sensitive man, who, eighteen years ago, winced at a strange glance, and walked in bye-lanes to avoid the chance passer-by on the forlorn moorland high-road, now contemplated with calmness that unutterable event, a cathedral dinner-party.

The first few days of his stay at Hesselburgh were gloriously fine and hot, so much so, that everybody was out of doors all day, and Evelyn and Hope had no

difficulty in ignoring one another completely, without attracting any attention.

In fact, all the gentlemen were shooting the whole of Friday and Saturday, and after dinner there was coffee in the garden, all the sportsmen too tired for much beyond languid and blissful enjoyment of their smoke, and an early retirement to prepare them for to-morrow's tramp.

On Sunday, the whole party bore down on the Minster in great state, and Leo's delight was considerable at being bowed to, and shaken hands with after service in face of Mrs. Hancock and all her following.

Tom asked Richard Forde to shoot with them the following day, and, as he thought he might feel himself justified in taking the afternoon, Muriel suggested that he should bring Leo to Hesselburgh after lunch and leave her to their care. Mrs. Saxon completed the feasibility of the plan, by volunteering to send the carriage to

fetch the brother and sister, and, when all was settled, it was hard to tell whose sensations of pleasure were keener—Leo's or Mr. Westmorland's.

That evening, however, the weather changed, becoming chilly and threatening. Monday morning brought a grey drizzle, and Tom and Evelyn, after being out all the morning, and getting wet through, came home to lunch, quite determined not to repeat the experiment that day. The drizzle now changed to a downpour, and chances of further sport were rendered entirely out of the question.

‘Never mind, darling,’ said Tom to Hope, ‘we’ll enjoy ourselves in spite of the weather. We’ll have a kitchen tea-party, Mollie loves them, and cookie shall give us grouse stewed in mushrooms. I am sure Miss Forde will like that.’

‘Tom!’ said Muriel, ‘you cannot possibly ask Dr. Forde to a kitchen tea-party the

very first time he comes to the house.'

'Then you shall give five-o'clock tea in your sitting-room, *tête-à-tête*, while Mollie and Hope, and Miss Leo and I, enjoy ourselves below.'

'I believe Dr. Forde will quite appreciate our rustic simplicity,' said Hope, reflectively. 'He has an interesting face—a face with many capabilities in it.'

'Oh, has he, miss? Then he shan't come,' snapped Tom.

'Tom, I think you are unreasonable; I might quite as fairly object to the presence of his fascinating sister: you are forgetting our compact.'

'What is the compact?' asked Mr. Lyster, with interest.

'Why, Mollie, I told you all about it,' said Tom, with that perfect seriousness of manner which always annoyed and baffled Mr. Westmorland. 'I told you that Hope has promised to marry me in ten years



from now, provided neither of us has, in that time, discovered anyone we like better.'

'Perfect liberty on both sides to marry anyone else in the meantime,' corrected Hope, likewise with complete gravity.

'An excellent plan,' said Mollie, with an immediate adoption of their tone and manner. 'I hope you will ask me to the wedding.'

'It must be a very quiet one, with such an aged bride,' said Hope, mournfully. 'I shall be thirty-three; I could not wear white. Tom will be twenty-seven.'

'I shall have to give Tom away, you see,' said Mollie.

'It might be nice if *he* wore white, as he will still be young and blooming,' suggested Hope. 'You would look very striking in orange-blossoms, Tom dear.'

'I'm afraid they would hardly stick on; what do you think, Mollie?' asked Tom,

who, lying on his back on the sofa, was supporting his sealskin-like head on his godfather's knee.

‘Perhaps they will be out of fashion by then,’ was Mollie’s best attempt at consolation, after stroking the glossy black poll.

‘We think of Gravesend for a wedding excursion,’ went on Hope.

‘Hanwell’s a pretty place, have you ever thought of settling there?’ innocently asked Mollie.

‘Upon my word, Tom, I hardly think we could do better!’ cried Hope, her self-command giving way at last, and breaking into a pretty wave of laughter, in which Mollie delightedly joined.

‘Oh, Mr. Lyster,’ she said, her sweet eyes turned pleadingly up to him, ‘are you not ashamed of me for encouraging him to be so painfully foolish?’

‘I do it myself, my dear, I do it myself,’

was his fond answer, as he pulled Thomas's ear.

One person in the room evidently did not take such a lenient view of Hope's conduct.

Major Westmorland had been standing in the window, square-shouldered and glum, gazing out at the pouring rain. Even in his back the girl could read how he despised her and her levity. As she put her last question he turned round and looked at her, a glance of such biting contempt that it stung her like a blow. She could not endure it passively ; her patience was exhausted. Hitherto the attack had been all on his side : he had declared war, he had avoided her, he had slighted her by absolutely refusing even to go in to dinner with her, she had not resisted in any way. Now she was determined to protest, to show him that she was entirely defiant of him, and not in the least ashamed of

herself. She looked up innocently in his face, in answer to his look.

‘Yes?’ she said. ‘I think you were going to say something?’

The unready Major was entirely disconcerted; he hesitated, looked daggers, stammered out, ‘Nothing!’ and hastily made his exit.

‘What an addition he will be to our party at Leaming,’ she said sweetly, as the door closed upon him. ‘So chatty!’

An unkind peal of laughter from the others followed this remark. Evelyn heard the laugh, though not the speech which evoked it. They were laughing at him, he thought. That heartless, shameless flirt, who could not even spare a boy like Tom, but must drag him captive at her chariot-wheel—who could bewitch and befool an elderly widower like Lyster till he was unable to judge her impartially—she was making game of him, Evelyn. Well, it was some-

thing to be thankful for that Disney had escaped her—he would write and put that view of the case before his friend. How could such a woman have such an exterior, such a modest, girlish, virginal air; such a sweet face and such a voice—a voice that fell on the ear like splashes of bright water on a thirsty soil. She seemed, to the young man's angry fancy all up in arms for his friend, like a special concoction of the devil to ensnare young men. He felt as if he could believe in the temptations of St. Anthony; in the appearance of beautiful fiends.

For was it not true that, were the room never so full of people, if Hope spoke, howsoever gently, he heard every word? It seemed to him as if he could see her with his eyes shut. He had dreamed of her three nights following—he, whose sound and profound slumber was rarely visited by any dreams at all.

And now they were suggesting that he should go and mew himself up for a week with her in a shooting-box on the moors ! Not he ! He had told his father that he did not at all care to go, and, to his unfeigned astonishment, Mr. Westmorland had seemed very sympathetic on the subject. Certainly, the Hesselburgh air was working wonders for him. Evelyn had never known him so amiable, so pleasant, so little inclined for his favourite pastime of gibing at and taunting his only son. If it had not been for the presence of this Miss Merrion he would be feeling happier than he had done for some time. She spoilt everything, stirred up all his worst feelings, paralysed his tongue, and the most grievous part of it all was that hateful fact that, though his mind and soul revolted, his senses yet felt the subtle charm which emanated from her. It was what he could not bear to think of, yet his severely truth-

ful nature was constrained to own that he had already allowed this woman to occupy a hundred times more of his thoughts than any other member of her sex had ever done before.

He descended the staircase absently, still pondering the disastrous state of things.

‘How there looked him in the face  
An angel, beautiful and bright,  
And how he knew it was a fiend,  
That miserable knight!’

Just as he reached the hall, the carriage drove up, the pitiless rain pelting on the smoking horses and the white mackintoshes of the men. The two Fordes alighted, and Evelyn, pleased to see his friend, went forward to greet him. Mrs. Saxon, who was, as usual, arranging details of the Sanitary League meeting with her friend, came out from the drawing-room, leaving the door open; so that Mr. Westmorland, from his seat at the fire, could see Evelyn

standing over pretty Leo and smiling at some remark of hers.

She was looking charming. In great trepidation had she donned her little white gown and sash, ashamed of her own ignorance as to what was 'the proper thing to wear.' A long, red cloak covered her, and made her look like an old picture. Evelyn's father fancied her, to himself, standing in the great hall at Feverell, with the Westmorland emeralds about her throat, and robed in shimmering brocade. He longed for the time when he could take her in his arms to kiss her and welcome his dear little daughter to her future rank and station. What an honour for the child! but he must think she was worthy of it. Hope Merrion was, of course, the one he himself would have chosen; but was it likely that such a girl would so much as look at a tongue-tied, heavy fellow like Evelyn? Leo was a very good



alternative; he ought to be grateful it was no worse, and really she was looking at the Major as if she liked him!

Tom had seen the return of the carriage, and was in the hall in an instant.

‘How first-rate of you to come through such weather!’ he cried.

‘As the carriage arrived, I concluded Mrs. Saxon expected us,’ said the doctor. ‘I had previously reduced my sister to the depths of despair by telling her that, as it was so wet, you would certainly not send for us.’

‘Of course we sent,’ replied the young gentleman; ‘this awful weather one wants somebody to cheer one up. Will you come upstairs to my sister’s sitting-room?’

Evelyn made his escape; he was not going back to the room where Hope was—not yet!

The kitchen at Hesselburgh was a charming place. Its old-fashioned, open range

precluded its ever being used for cooking except on the rarest occasions. New stoves had been fitted into the other kitchens, which were nearer the servants' hall. The stones of the floor were white as snow, the crimson matting formed a pretty contrast. The best dinner-service, in all the rich depth of its old 'Crown Derby' colouring, gleamed on the spotless dresser. The atmosphere was always warm and sleepy, and soothed by the loud ticking of the immemorial 'grandfather's clock' in the corner. The huge black oak arm-chairs came from a farmhouse on the estate, and were more than three centuries old.

Here nurse and Mrs. Heather, the house-keeper, used to sit on Sunday evenings in peace; and here oftentimes of an evening Tom brought his pipe, and Hope and Muriel sat on the fender and made toffee.

When the invading force to-day marched

down the echoing passages and into their favourite haunt, they found the room already in occupation of the large tortoise-shell cat, Caligula by name, who was mounting guard over a quantity of bedding which surrounded the sumptuous fire.

‘My stars!’ cried Tom, who marched in first, pausing to stare at the goodly show of mattresses, pillows, and blankets, ‘this is jolly considerate of cookie, providing us with divans gratis. Walk in, ladies and gentlemen! This is not, as you might think, the cooling-room of a Turkish bath.’

‘Sakes alive!’ ejaculated Mrs. Heather, to the official next in rank to herself, pausing with the pastry-scissors in her hand, ‘if that ain’t Master Tom took and marched all the visitors into my kitchen, with all the bedding airing for the gentlemen that’s coming over from Tettle shooting!’

She trotted her stout self into the kitchen

and paused, with the broadest of grins on her good-humoured countenance, at sight of Tom, Muriel, Miss Merrion, Mr. Lyster, and the two Fordes, all arrived in her territory.

‘Master Tom, whatever are you doing with my cat?’

‘He doesn’t want all these pillows, cookie; I’m going to make the ladies comfortable.’

‘The ladies would be a deal more comfortable in the parlour, sir, I’m sure.’

‘Oh! you go along back where you came from, old lady. Where are all those grouse I brought in last week?’

‘Hanging, of course, sir.’

‘You pick me out a pair of the nicest.’

‘The missis has give orders for all that isn’t for table to-morrow to be sent down to the Deanery.’

‘You bet they don’t go! I’m not going to shoot birds for the blooming Deanery!’

cried Tom, much exercised with the weight of the mattresses, combined with this opposition to his will. 'There, Miss Forde ! you'll find that luxury itself ! How fortunate all these things were handy ! Three men are coming over from Tettle to shoot with my *pater* to-morrow, and that's why, I suppose ! Now, I'll go and cook your tea myself, as cookie seems to have got a pain in her temper. Come along, Mrs. Heather, you just do as I tell you ;' and he drove the submissive old woman out of the kitchen, shut the door, and could be heard distinctly, though distantly, asking if she thought Mrs. Abbott, at Leaming, ever made difficulties when he wanted anything. 'But we're off to Leaming next week, so perhaps we shall be a bit more comfortable,' he concluded, pathetically.

Any mention of Leaming always disarmed cookie at once, as the artful Thomas knew full well, and he shortly reappeared

with a beaming face, to announce that a *recherché* collation would soon be forthcoming.

‘Tom, these pillows are too luxurious, I shall soon be asleep,’ said Muriel, in the soothing tones of absolute comfort.

The three gentlemen preferred the oak chairs, but the girls all looked very pretty, reclining among their cushions. Richard Forde thought Muriel appeared like the beauty in the Palace of Sleep, with her soft golden locks shading her calm brow. This kitchen tea-party was certainly a wonderfully good prescription for banishing formality and producing friendliness. It was hardly to be believed that they were all meeting for the first time, so sociable did they speedily become.

‘Tom, let us be brilliant, and devise sports,’ cried Hope, who was in high spirits. ‘Here are six of us—young and able-bodied. Can we not invent something to

astonish the elders to-night—a charade, or something?’

‘A charade? Oh, do!’ cried Leo.

After all, these ‘county’ girls were very easy to get on with—quite simple and natural, and with apparently the same tastes as she herself.

‘A good idea, Hope—you invent one,’ said Muriel, placidly.

‘Isn’t that Muriel to a T!’ cried Tom, fraternally. ‘You invent, and she’ll play. That’s the division of labour. Hope and I get up at five to gather mushrooms, and Muriel eats them!’

Muriel laughed in perfectly good-humoured acquiescence.

‘Well, Hope and you are brilliant—I’m not,’ she replied. ‘That was a splendid charade you invented at Cousin Mary’s last Easter. Won’t you do that again?’

‘Impossible!’ cried Hope; ‘that only

included us two, and we want something to set everybody busy to-night, with heaps of dressing-up.'

'We have a property-box, absolutely full of stage costumes, which want airing most awfully,' announced Tom.

'Let us have *tableaux vivants*,' suggested Richard Forde. 'I am a splendid hand at keeping still.'

This idea found general favour; even Muriel was delighted with it. Tom was despatched to bid one of the maids bring down the costume-box into Muriel's sitting-room, and to see that the background of curtains was duly erected in the large drawing-room. Hope took out a pencil, begged a half-sheet of paper from Mollie, and prepared to be business-like. Everyone made impossible suggestions, and even Muriel was in fits of laughter when Tom reappeared, his countenance visibly sobered down.



‘I say,’ he said, lugubriously, ‘the *mater* thinks we ought to invite Westmorland to be in the show.’

## CHAPTER XIII.

## TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

A stranger, and alone,  
 Among that brotherhood,  
 The monk Felix stood.

LONGFELLOW.

AFTER an instantaneous, but significant pause, Muriel said, calmly,

‘Of course. But where is he?’

‘In the library, or the billiard-room, I imagine. He can’t be out of doors in this cataract. Shall I go and tell him we are here?’

‘I wish you would, dear Tom,’ said his sister; and the good-humoured boy danced off, and, opening the library door, peeped cautiously in.

The Major was seated in a low American chair near the window, doing absolutely nothing but gazing out upon the persistent rain. His hands were deeply thrust into his pockets, and he was so still, that at first Tom thought that he was asleep; but the large steady grey eyes were wide open, with a look in them which was both weary and sad.

‘I say, Westmorland, you’re looking down in the mouth,’ said Tom, cheerily. ‘No wonder, if you sit here with nobody to interview but that confounded rain! I have been sent to hunt you out.’

Evelyn looked up, and half closed the book upon his knee.

‘You’re very kind,’ he said, ‘but I am sorry you should trouble about me. I have been reading.’

‘Well, they’re all having tea in the kitchen,’ persuasively went on the ambassador, ‘and now they are all seized with

an idea to have impromptu *tableaux* to-night. We want your opinion—come on !

Evelyn looked distressed.

‘I’m no good at it, Tom. I should feel like a fish out of water among you all.’

‘Oh, rubbish !’ was the friendly answer, ‘you used to be fond of such things ! What has come over you ?’

As the frank humorous young face bent over him, the Major felt a sudden impulse of friendliness towards the boy.

‘I think I am growing old, Tom,’ he said, with a sigh, ‘we lead a lonely life at Feverell.’

‘Old ! A fine joke ! Shake it off and come along. You miss no end of the fun, always moping away by yourself, I tell you.’

‘I don’t fancy I—I’m much wanted either,’ hesitated Evelyn.

Tom felt a little guilty, as he thought of that sudden hush in the kitchen which

had greeted the speaker's name, but he gave a straight-forward, manly answer.

'The fact is, that they think you look down on them. You put your back into it, show 'em what you can do, and they'll all think no end of you.'

Evelyn laughed. Such persuasiveness could not fail to impress ; besides, his lonely heart was longing to be cheered—he wanted to feel once more young amongst the young. He laid down his book, with a paper-knife to mark the place—the page over which he had been reflecting,

' One likes to show the truth, for the truth  
That the woman was light, is very true.  
But suppose she says,—“ Never mind that youth,  
What wrong have I done to you ? ” '

He repeated those words, those last words, over to himself as Tom and he passed through the swing-door, and threaded the tortuous stone passages in the servants' regions. What harm had she

done to him? Was he justified in showing so sharp, so decided a resentment? Would it not, after all, be better to treat her with dignified politeness, declining only any advances towards intimacy? He was half afraid that he had been behaving rather foolishly.

Anything more comical, and, at the same moment, more inviting, than the aspect of the kitchen as they entered, would be difficult to imagine. A zealous and much-amused kitchen-maid had just spread the table with tea, jam, piles of hot cakes, and the peculiar glory of Tom's *menu*—grouse, stewed with mushrooms in cream.

Mollie had been commanded to take the head of the table, and Richard was handing cups to the three girls, enthroned among the billowing mattresses.

‘Hope!’ were the words that greeted Evelyn’s ear, in Leo Forde’s bright tones.

‘Here are three of us—could we not have a girl’s tableau—the three virtues?’

‘Capital!’ said Mollie, approvingly.

‘I am so tired of puns on my name!’ objected Hope, petulantly.

‘Your name is so very characteristic, duckie,’ said Tom.

‘So it is,’ agreed Muriel, ‘you always see the bright side of things.’

‘Miss Merrion must see the epitaph at Leaming, must she not, Tom?’ asked Mollie.

‘I was thinking of that,’ said Muriel. ‘There is a tablet in the wall of the church at Leaming, with an inscription which entirely turns upon a pun on your name, Hope.’

‘Yes, a last century man, of the romantic name of Pepper, who modestly describes himself as a “man of letters,” lost his only daughter, who was called Hope,’ said Tom, narratively, ‘and he put up a very pretty

verse to her memory, very pretty indeed, though the first line is either cribbed from a very well-known one, or else is a strange coincidence. Let's see—can you say it, Mollie ?'

Mr. Lyster took off his spectacles, and recited as follows :

' Hope lives for ever in ye human herte,  
When Hope dyes, therefore, thou hast done thy parte.  
Go, rest, poor soule ! with lyfe thou canst not cope,  
Nor bear its sorrows, havynge lost thy Hope !'

' There is real pathos in that,' said Richard, feelingly.

' It is true, no one could live without Hope,' said the owner of that name impetuously, and something bright flashed in her expressive eyes.

Tom, looking at her sympathetically, knew that she was thinking of Nellie, the girl who had resigned first hope, then existence, and now, after life's fitful fever, slept well in the very churchyard where this other Hope was laid.



‘Every Sunday, as her heart was slowly breaking, she must have read that dreary tablet on the wall,’ thought the girl, with passionate sympathy and regret: the story had certainly made a deep impression on her.

Evelyn was very silent. The recitation of the old quatrain had recalled to his mind the piece of doggerel which had turned his father’s brain. Two lines in it came forcibly before him, and, in the light of that fanciful play upon a name, gave him a curious sensation.

‘Withouten Hope it shulde betyde,  
The last sonne ys an onely childe.’

‘What folly,’ he thought to himself in angry contempt, but he was thankful that none of the audience present knew of the prophecy.

It was impossible to tell to what foolish conclusions Tom’s sharp wits would have led him.

He looked at Miss Merrion; it was almost the first time he had allowed his eyes to rest upon her since he discovered her identity. Her wide, sad eyes were fixed upon the pouring rain outside, her small smooth cheek, slightly flushed by contact with the great fire, rested on her hand. In spite of her late high spirits, she was feeling depressed, ashamed of the nonsense she had talked to Tom, with the sole object of disgusting the Major. A sense of injustice and cruelty on his part gave her a feeling of wrong. Why was he so hard and merciless to her, when he was so good and tender to his most irritating father? She looked at him, perhaps for an answer to this conundrum, and met the fixed gaze of his steady grey eyes.

It seemed to Evelyn Westmorland as if a strange thrill passed over his whole being. His heart leaped, as if it would rise to his throat, the blood coursed madly through

his frame. For a moment everything grew dim to his sight, then astonishingly clear. For how long had he been gazing into those wide eyes, with their wet lashes? A second? an hour? And what could it mean, this sudden, new emotion which enfolded him? Was it pain, or pleasure? What did he want to do? To take Hope Merrion to his heart, and kiss away the drops that trembled in act to fall?

With what seemed to him a bodily wrench, he tore his look away from her face, and looked down at his plate, to steady himself; the hand which grasped it was shaking.

Well! it was over. The chat in the room was going on as before. Nobody had noticed his brief aberration. He could believe now in the story of the sirens. How strong it had been, momentarily, that strange, horrible, delicious impulse! It filled him with shame and repugnance.

‘I seem marked for misfortune,’ was his morbid reflection. ‘All my life, I have never known what men meant by falling in love; why am I visited now by this horrible infatuation? Fortunately, I am old enough and strong enough to hate it and to crush it.’

He looked, at the moment, as if he were ready to hate and to crush the unconscious cause of so much disorder. Hope winced as she encountered his morose look. She rather inclined to the idea that his solitary life with his eccentric father had made him unlike other people, she could not otherwise explain his extraordinary attitude of personal enmity. That he should dislike the woman whom he believed to have treated his friend badly, seemed natural enough, but this fierce hostility was unaccountable. She had never before encountered hatred, and it pained her unspeakably; moreover, she thought the

whole party must soon see it, it was so offensively obvious.

‘Hope,’ said she to herself, ‘some measures must be taken to stop this. You must pick up the dignity which, when with Tom and Muriel, you habitually lay aside, and show this man his place.’

‘Hope is Hope, Muriel Faith, and Miss Forde Charity,’ announced Tom, with unction. ‘Westmorland, will you be a wounded knight, for Miss Forde to exercise her charitable functions upon?’

‘Certainly,’ said Evelyn, promptly, for he liked Leo.

‘What am I to do with him? Give him a dose of medicine?’ asked the young lady, quaintly.

‘No, no! How unpoetical you are!’ cried Tom. ‘He is dying for his country, or something of that kind, and you support his fainting head.’

‘I hope he will not forget what it is he

dies for, like Gambetta,' laughed Richard.

'I don't have to say anything, do I?' cried Evelyn, in sudden panic.

'No, no, no—oh, dear, no! You merely have to look half dead and interesting,' said Tom, re-assuringly.

'I feel certain I ought to be holding a cup to his lips,' said Leo.

'I think it would look well,' opined Mollie.

'I shall whisper to you, "a tablespoonful in water, three times a day,"' said Leo, solemnly.

'If you do, I'll punish you, you young monkey,' said Richard, with severity.

'It would be still more realistic if you were to hold his nose, Miss Forde,' put in the incorrigible Tom.

'Don't make game, Tom, this is a serious tableau,' said Muriel, 'and it will be very pretty. I shall hold a lamp, as well as the ebony cross, and Hope will

have the great anchor which we made for Britannia.'

'Couldn't I be kneeling at her feet, as her knight, with my motto painted whacking big on my shield, *Dum spiro spero?*' pleaded Tom.

'No, nonsense, Tom. That tableau is settled most satisfactorily. Now, the next is the Casket Scene from the "*Merchant of Venice*." Hope is Portia, Miss Forde Nerissa, Major Westmorland Bassanio, Tom Gratiano. That ought to be a good one, the dresses are lovely.'

'And next,' cried Hope, interrupting, 'Tennyson's "*Day Dream*," in three scenes. Mr. Forde as the Prince, Muriel the enchanted Princess. In the first scene, the Prince, with drawn sword, lifts the curtain and looks in; in the second, he bends over the couch; in the third, everybody is wide-awake.'

'Capital!' said Mollie, 'and, with the

three others already settled, that makes enough, I think. Now to rehearsal.'

'We will retire upstairs for that, as you have all done tea, and there we can inspect the costumes,' suggested Muriel; and they evacuated the kitchen, pausing on the way to propose and carry a vote of thanks to cookie for her hospitality.

Evelyn was surprised to find that the grouping and arranging for these *tableaux* was anything but irksome to him. Perhaps a word or two of approbation was felt to be more stimulating than he was willing to allow. A murmur from one of the girls of 'Major Westmorland really does it very well,' an approving nod from Mr. Lyster, had their effect, though he might not care to own that it was so.

His appearance in armour—one of the suits from the hall—was certainly captivating. Mrs. Saxon looked in on the busy company for a minute to announce that



she had sent the carriage for the curate and his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Copeland, to swell their audience; and she paused, really surprised at the fine look of his square, stern head and dark, closely-curling hair, set off by the gleaming corslet. His casque he held in his hand, and the mistress of the house stood so long regarding him that, at last, it struck even him as amusing. He laughed his rare, pleasant laugh, and made her a sweeping bow.

‘Has your ladyship any commands to lay upon me?’ he asked.

‘Such as to fetch the “mighty Boke” from the hand of the dead wizard, Michael Scott? No, but you look quite fitted for such an errand,’ said the lady, with real admiration, ‘though hardly such an unlettered champion as Deloraine; more like Hope’s favourite, Count Gismond, perhaps.’

‘Not in the least like Count Gismond!’ cried Hope, in a hurry; and then checked herself, and added, confusedly, ‘at least, I always think Gismond was fair.’

‘Scarcely, if you consider his nationality,’ said Mrs. Saxon; ‘but I must be off and settle the preliminaries of this impromptu dinner-party.’

‘We Saxons love to do things on the spur of the moment,’ remarked Tom, in tones of satisfaction, as the door closed upon her. ‘You will see what a success this show will be, just because it is spontaneous—evolved out of our respective consciousnesses; only one wants to be awfully clever to do it well. Fortunately, we are that.’

‘We are, we are!’ laughed Hope.

It seemed to Evelyn as if that whole evening passed away like a dream, until suddenly he awakened to find himself alone in Mrs. Saxon’s morning-room,

which was doing duty as a green-room.

He walked in clad in his armour, fully attired for his part in the 'Three Virtues' *tableau*. Nobody was there; another picture, in which he had no part, was being shown. He had already appeared, as a very handsome Bassanio in the 'Casket Scene,' and his father had only wished that Leo, and not Hope, had been the Portia; though he was constrained to admit that the parts had been rightly allotted, and that to reverse them would be to spoil the *tableau*.

Hope's expression of dignity struggling with longing, suspense, and fear, was inimitable. Bassanio looked as if he fully realised the gravity of the situation.

'I am a born actress, am I not?' Hope had said afterwards to Muriel, as she removed the heavy brocade from her slim person. 'I so lost myself in the part that I quite forgot how I dislike that man!'

‘Do you dislike him?’ asked Muriel, with a faint accent of surprise.

Hope made a gesture of repugnance, and gave a little shudder.

‘He is like a bad conscience, always reminding me of my one great mistake.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I have not told you before—somehow it made me feel sick to talk of it; but he is a friend of Edgar Disney, and has heard his version of that hateful affair! Ugh! I wish I had not mentioned it, it puts a bad taste in my mouth. I sometimes think, Muriel, that I wish I had never been born.’

‘It is no good to wish that,’ was the calm answer, ‘because you are born; you don’t want to die, do you?’

‘No!’ cried Hope, sharply, drawing her two hands suddenly to her heart as if to shut in the life, ‘no, no! I do not want to die. I love life—especially in summer-

time. I love it! I want to keep it, and enjoy it. I will not let him spoil it; I will be happy in spite of him!’

Muriel stood very still, her golden hair in a shower about her, looking earnestly at her friend.

‘I wonder how it is,’ she observed at length, ‘that you always manage to crowd so many emotions into your life? nothing ever happens to me.’

‘I am always in a scrape, somehow,’ said Hope; and she laughed, but the laugh was a tearful one.

Tom banged on the door.

‘Come on, Muriel! You’re wanted on at once.’

The golden-haired apparition vanished, and Hope, left to herself, resolutely dashed away the inconvenient drops, and arrayed herself for her emblematical appearance in simple white draperies, with a diamond star in the soft hair above her forehead.

She knew that she looked very pretty, as she stood before the long glass; but she did not linger there, for personal vanity was a failing she was almost wholly without. Gathering up her trailing white robes, she crept softly into the green-room to find her anchor; and there stood Evelyn, in full harness, his arms folded over the hilt of his huge sword.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE MAJOR TO THE RESCUE.

One should master one's passions—love in chief  
And be loyal to one's friends.

R. BROWNING.

EACH faced the other silently a moment, and then Hope turned aside and fetched her great gilt anchor from the corner where it leaned against the wall. Without a word to her companion, she sat down and began to arrange a wreath of flowers round its stem. After a complete silence, he spoke with great suddenness.

‘What made you say that I was not like Count Gismond?’

She replied without looking up, or showing any signs of surprise.

‘Count Gismond would not believe slander against a woman,’ said she, gently.

‘Have I done so?’ he asked, hesitatingly. ‘Have I been too hasty—believed something about you that was not true?’

‘I am really quite unable to inform you,’ said Hope, sarcastically. ‘I fancy you know very little of me, and you have thought proper to be extremely rude; but, as to your beliefs or misbeliefs about me, I am quite ignorant, and I must confess that they trouble me very little.’

He was not at once ready with a rejoinder. When at last he spoke, it was with some agitation.

‘I hate injustice,’ he said, in the tone of one excusing himself, ‘and I think I resent injuries to my friends more keenly than injuries to myself. I have been led to believe that you are the Miss Merrion



who has broken my friend's heart ; if I have been too hasty—if there is any mistake, I shall feel like despairing of forgiveness.'

He waited, but she gave no answer.

'Has there been a mistake?' he asked, severely.

'I think there has, but it is a slight one,' she said at last, and coolly. 'I am not at all inclined to believe that I have broken anyone's heart; but it is true that I was engaged to Captain Disney, and that I broke the engagement. I believe these are the facts which, in your judgment, deprive me of the right to the ordinary conventional civilities of society.'

'I am afraid,' he said, in a low voice, 'that I have expressed my feelings with unwarrantable plainness. I—I think, though, you would find it easier to forgive me if you could see his letters, and easier to believe in your having made him suffer terribly.'

‘Captain Disney was always a good letter-writer,’ said Hope, icily. ‘I have seen specimens of his skill in that way.’

‘You can never have known him, if you speak of him in that tone.’

‘I wish I never had,’ she replied, emphatically.

‘We shall always disagree on this point,’ he said, angrily. ‘Always. It is a waste of time to discuss it.’

He looked at her in a tumult of feeling, as she sat deftly twining the flowers about her anchor, with graceful movements of her white bare arms. Utterly heartless! he thought. And yet he yearned to know the whole—to know why Miss Merrion had dismissed her lover.

‘I wish I knew the whole facts of the case!’ he burst out, almost without intending it.

‘That you never will,’ said Hope, decidedly, ‘for I have not the slightest wish

or intention to justify myself to you ; and you will certainly not get the truth from Captain Disney.'

'This of my friend ! Thank you, Miss Merrion,' he said, in deep resentment.

'I am sure the subject must be very painful to you, but, in fairness, remember that you introduced the discussion,' was her quiet answer.

He turned away, baffled ; and, as he turned, she raised her eyes and looked at him, a curious look, impossible to describe.

The door was now opened to admit Leo and Muriel, both dressed for their parts, and both looking exceedingly pretty.

Evelyn thought, however, that something was wanting in both of them—that rare, subtle charm which he felt that Hope possessed. He was convinced, at last, that this charm was a snare, he did not believe that it was possessed by any woman truly

simple-minded and modest; he was half inclined to hold that it was horror which stirred him as his eyes so perversely rested upon her. He noticed her pretty arm, curved so delicately about her flower-wreathed emblem, and the little flexible fingers which coaxed the blossoms into place with tender touches. Cruel hands! They had not scrupled to toss Disney's heart away in the dust, as the little feet danced along their happy road of popularity, youth, and sunshine!

'How pretty you have made your anchor!' cried Leo, with warm admiration.

'I am thinking I have misinterpreted my character,' she answered, with a small, unsteady laugh. 'I wish that I had adopted the imagery of the painter, Watts, and blinded my eyes, and sat me down in sadness with my harp, and all the strings broken except one. It is far nearer our earthly idea of Hope!'

‘Nonsense, duckie,’ said Tom, who had come in as she made this cheerful speech, ‘don’t talk like that, but make haste. Come along, William of Deloraine!’

It was a pretty picture. Hope was the glory of it. Everyone’s eyes rested longest on the inspired little face, and the limbs so lightly poised that it seemed as if she must float upwards. Muriel looked like a saint enshrined, the light of her lamp flickering over her peaceful face: and Leo was most tenderly sympathetic as she bent over the wounded hero.

It was a thousand pities that any untoward adventure should mar the artistic pleasure which this *tableau* created. Muriel’s lamp was formed by a piece of lighted candle which had accidentally become loose, having been insecurely fixed; moreover, it is difficult, as everyone knows, to hold anything straight for long, without looking at it, and, after a very short time,

the strain of lifting her arm so high made her hand shake. It took but a puff of wind from a suddenly opened door to blow over the toppling candle, and it fell on Charity's flimsy white robe.

Muriel, her eyes being fixed in another direction, did not know that it was the lighted candle which dropped. Leo, stooping over her knight, did not regard it; it was not until a bright forked flame shot up in the eyes of the recumbent knight himself, that he leaped to his feet, to see the young girl in a blaze.

Leo, for the moment, was panic-struck, and would have run, but Evelyn caught her in a grip like iron, and, horribly impeded by his armour, forced her down upon the floor. The flame touching her flesh at the moment made her shriek, there was a rush forward of the audience, and Richard was on the platform in a moment, but Hope was quickest. In an instant she

had seized one of the heavy curtains which were hung on screens to form a background to the stage, and before even Tom who had darted for the hearth-rug in the green-room could return, had flung it to the Major, who, holding it down on the struggling girl, crushed out the fire in a moment.

‘It is all right,’ he said at once, in his natural voice, and quite composedly. ‘Tom, tell them there is no harm done. Miss Forde, are you unhurt? I am afraid I was rather rough with you, but there was not a moment to be lost.’

‘She has fainted,’ said her brother, hurriedly, as he bent over her with ashy face and trembling voice. ‘God bless you, Westmorland, she must have been hurt before I could get to her.’

‘Is she not burned at all?’ asked the Major, in a tone of keen anxiety.

‘I can scarcely tell, her dress is scorch-

ed—no ! I certainly don't see anything,' said Dick, feverishly. 'Poor little woman ! Leo darling !'

'Lift her up,' said Evelyn, in the short, military tones of one commanding. 'Carry her upstairs, lay her on her bed. Don't let her come to herself in this crowd.'

Dick obediently followed instructions, and carried the pale form of sweet Charity through the sympathetic audience into the hall, where he paused irresolute, until Muriel's gentle tones were heard.

'This way, to my room—oh ! it was all my fault !' she cried.

'There is no harm done, indeed, Miss Saxon,' said Richard, gasping a little over his burden, 'she is only frightened, not hurt, thanks to Westmorland ; he's a queer sort, but a real help in an emergency.'

So they proceeded to Muriel's room, where, with the help of nurse, they devoted themselves to Leo.



‘And now, I suppose, I can go and get rid of this ridiculous get-up,’ said Evelyn, crossly, walking into the green-room.

His eyes looked round restlessly, apparently in search of some one who was not there.

‘Well done, indeed, Sir Knight,’ cried cordial little Mollie, beaming through his spectacles with effusion.

‘It is Miss Merrion really whom we should thank,’ was the bluff reply. ‘I had nothing handy, and this detestable armour was so much in my way. She has a great deal of presence of mind.’

‘She has, indeed, everything one could wish. I have never known anyone so charming,’ was the warm answer. Evelyn was silent at this, and marched out of the room, coming, in the hall, suddenly into contact with his father. He started back, puzzled at the strangely softened look in the face which, to him, usually expressed so much acerbity.

‘My dear Evelyn, my dear son,’ faltered Mr. Westmorland, taking the big hand in both of his. ‘Evelyn, my boy, I am proud of you—yes, proud!’

Evelyn stood petrified; he was far too shy to receive so totally unexpected a tribute gracefully, but his whole heart softened and swelled out on the instant to answer this precious touch of love. He felt an uncomfortable expanding in his throat, and the colour came to his dark face, as he said, harshly,

‘You are mistaken, I did nothing. It was the obvious thing. I was nearest to her.’

‘You did well,’ was the answer, with the voice and manner of an emperor commending his vassal, ‘exceedingly well, and the circumstance will no doubt tell in your favour with the young lady.’

‘I don’t so much care about that,’ said

his son, between his teeth, 'so long as it tells in my favour with you.'

Whereat the old man looked him in the eyes, narrowly, and yet kindly, and replied, with an affectionate smile,

'My son, if you sincerely wish for my favour, you know full well the immediate way to obtain it,' and so passed on, down the passage, leaving the soldier with his heart beating great, heavy strokes against his side, because his father had spoken a kind word to him.

He repaired to his room, and rang up the valet to help him out of his armour, a rare proceeding with him; and when the man arrived,

'You must get the scissors, and cut me out of this sleeve, please,' he said, 'or you may be bringing off the skin as well; I am scorched, I fancy.'

He had a considerable burn, four or five

inches long, and very raw, and it was painful enough to make him set his teeth firmly while Farren was dressing it; but for all that it was little heed he took of the pain, for dwelling on the words that had so warmed his heart.

‘It’s fearfully hard to go against him when he is kind,’ he thought. ‘God bless him! what a wonderful man he is.’

And, after the servant had left him, he sat down for a little while alone, to steady himself, and so fell to reflecting and musing as to whether or no it were quite impossible for him to carry out that beloved father’s will. It surely would not be hard to be gentle and kind all the days of his life to a bright creature like Leo Forde. And what a companion she would be for his father! For, in these for-the-first-time-indulged matrimonial schemes, the idea of separating from him never once occurred to Evelyn. She would light

up the old house, and amuse them both. And she, at least, was innocent and ingenuous. Surely he could keep her so. If only she did not find him, Evelyn, too terribly dull. That was his weak point. He felt himself so incapable of holding such a young, whimsical thing, full of life and joy; he seemed to himself, owing to his father's long training, quite destitute of the power to attract strongly. He had always fought so shy of women that now he was out of touch with them. All freedom of intercourse had been checked by Mr. Westmorland's nonsense about the prophecy and the experience of his garrison friends had not been encouraging.

And yet—yet—was it not his duty to risk it now? Certainly he was not in love with Leo, but at all events she had no rival . . . no, no rival. He could devote his life to doing his duty to her—making her as happy as he knew how. He did not

believe in 'falling in love.' It was an illusion—a fantasy.

He caught his breath sharply, and closed his eyes. The vision of Hope rose before him—Hope in her white robes, with milky arms twining flowers about the golden anchor; he smelt vividly the perfume of violets which always seemed to go with her. It revolted him. To marry Leo, to have a wife and interests of his own—would not that be the best way to cure the inexplicable madness which had seized him? He felt as if he must build up defences, make walls, dig trenches, to separate himself from the hateful influence—from the power she seemed to exhale, as flowers do sweetness.

'I believe I ought to try,' he said, half aloud. 'He will be so pleased—and he is all I have to care about.'

## CHAPTER XV.

## A DESIGNING GIRL.

Neither man's aristocracy, this, nor God's—God knoweth !

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.

It is curious to notice how, in this our wide-awake and carefully-guarded century, wherein nobody is surprised and nothing ever happens for which everyone was not fully prepared, what a sensation any kind of adventure, no matter how trifling, makes in the British household.

In the days when watchmen were set upon the walls continually, the everlasting presence of danger braced the nerves,

it is to be supposed ; but at Hesselburgh, the least jar in the admirably oiled household machinery was an extraordinary exception.

The incident of the fire and of the Major's prompt action spread like magic. The servants eyed him with admiring glances when he appeared again, and told all their particular friends in the village. Mr. Clarke, the curate, and Mr. and Mrs. Copeland made a point of driving next morning into Norchester to let folks have the benefit of a ripple of news in the stagnant pool of dulness which was their chronic condition. Mr. Clarke had an errand at the Residence. With all the pride of an eye-witness, he related to Canon Shorthouse the thrilling and romantic incident. Mrs. Shorthouse called that very afternoon on Mrs. Hancock to let her share in the piquancy of the sensation.



Mrs. Hancock and her son were seated among all the glories of clean chintzes and stiff, white Nottingham lace curtains in their drawing-room, entertaining the Misses Press with tea. The music-stool wore a crochet antimacassar with an air of conscious pride, and not only the gilt chimney mirror, but also the green and white lustres were duly provided with pink-paper filagree coverings. Mrs. Hancock prided herself upon being a good housekeeper. The tea was beyond reproach, certainly, and the old silver melon tea-pot as bright as care could make it. Mr. Sayers Hancock handed round hot cakes to the two thin spinster ladies with genial, though nervous goodwill.

Mrs. Hancock wore, super-added (as Laurence Sterne would say) to the festive purple gown, a large collar of Limerick lace, in the centre of which a lively miniature of the late Mr. Hancock reposed, with

a roguish smile ; though, if local report was to be trusted, which it probably was not, his connubial repose, whilst he was still in the flesh, had not been as ideal as it might be.

Into these surroundings the canon's wife was cordially received ; and surely no atmosphere could have been more congenial for such a charming little piece of news. She was not in a hurry ; she never spoilt the effect of an announcement by any ill-considered haste. Like Louis Moore, she preferred to taste the nectar of existence cool as dew. It was not until she had drunk a cup of tea, eaten two pieces of well-buttered tea-cake, and been informed that the Misses Gall (five in number) had gone abroad, and that the married brother of the Misses Openshaw was, after all, not to be expected from America this summer, that she remarked, casually,

‘ I suppose you have heard that the

Fordes were at Hesselburgh last night?’

The red and vindictive eye of Mrs. Hancock fixed itself balefully on the speaker.

‘Oh, indeed! A party?’ said she.

‘A party it must have been, by all I can hear; though Mr. Clarke, who was present, says it was an impromptu one.’

‘Present, was he?’ said the elder Miss Press, in breathless interest. ‘And did he tell you all about it?’

‘It was a theatrical party,’ announced Mrs. Shorthouse, bringing out the dire news with a look of perfect unconcern, as if she were ignorant of the flutter of disapproval which would infallibly follow her statement.

‘I am not in the least surprised,’ said Mrs. Hancock, superbly.

‘I really don’t know what the dean and Mrs. Goslett will say!’ cried Miss Harriet Press.

‘It’s much good their saying will do them!’ returned the hostess, grimly. ‘I hear there are to be theatricals at the palace next Christmas.’

‘We live to see changes,’ said Miss Press, piously, as if resolved that it was her duty to take theatricals as patiently as any other trial.

‘Were they—er—good—the theatricals?’ questioned the stout and bearded Mr. Sayers Hancock, with some trepidation.

His business was in Wokeford, which, as everyone knows, is a manufacturing town and much more go-ahead than Norchester, and he was apt to think that his austere mother drew her line in too narrow a circle. He had seen nothing to censure, either in the countenance or manners of Miss Forde.

‘Mr. Clarke tells me they were most sumptuously got up; Miss Merrion appeared covered with diamonds,’ replied

Mrs. Shorthouse, on whose utterances the whole party hung rapt.

‘Dear me! that was the pretty girl who behaved so—ahem!—so *peculiarly* at Duffield the other day,’ said Miss Press; ‘walking about the gardens with half-a-dozen young gentlemen at her heels.’

‘Just so! But the interesting part of my story is yet to come,’ said the narrator, unable to resist a smile of intense satisfaction at this point. ‘Quite a romance in real life! Though, indeed, it is a mercy the consequences were not more serious.’

‘Bless me! What happened?’ gasped Miss Harriet, while the eyes of all the rest of the audience asked the same question.

‘May I trouble you with my cup, Mr. Hancock?’ went on the oracle, serenely. ‘Yes, thank you! Another cup, Mrs. Hancock—cream and sugar. Oh, thanks! I always say your tea is more to be praised than any in Norchester. Another cake!’

Must I? I shall eat no dinner to-night! But in these days five o'clock tea is such an institution.'

Her listeners were on the rack, the tea-maker almost insensible even to compliment, so eager was she for what was coming.

'You were saying——' she murmured.

'I was saying,' said Mrs. Shorthouse, replacing her half-emptied cup in the saucer. 'Oh, yes, about Miss Forde's terrible accident.'

'Accident!'

'Leonora Forde!' they cried, almost simultaneously.

'Yes, indeed! It is only through the presence of mind of Major Westmorland that she escaped being burnt to death!'

'You don't say so!'

Here indeed was a sensation! Here was something to flavour the Norchester tea-parties all through the dreary winter

months that were coming! An adventure! An accident! A rescue! Victim—a pretty girl, hero—an eligible young man! Nothing was lacking to heighten the interest or arouse the imagination.

The very air vibrated with excitement, the unamiable Maltese terrier with a pink ribbon about its neck, leaped from its cushions and yapped shrilly.

‘It appears,’ said the canon’s wife, when order had been restored, ‘that they were performing some scene in which Leo Forde, all in white, had to support Major Westmorland’s head, he being dressed in armour.’

‘Good gracious!’ said Mrs. Hancock.

‘Miss Saxon stood behind with a lighted torch, a spark fell on Miss Forde’s dress, instantly she was a mass of flames. In a moment the Major had leaped to his feet, seized her in his arms, and, while all the spectators were dumb with horror, stamped

out the fire with the utmost heroism. He was then seen to hang over her lifeless body in agony, repeatedly crying to her brother to know if she were hurt. Finally he carried her upstairs in his arms.'

'What, the Major?' said Mr. Hancock.

'Yes, indeed! The canon had the whole story from Mr. Clarke, who is not likely to make inaccurate statements! Major Westmorland bore the unconscious girl upstairs, and then, overcome with emotion, retired to his own room and locked himself in. When at last he did come down, he was as white as ashes. Young Saxon went up to him and seized him by the wrist, when he gave a stifled cry, and turned quite livid. They looked at his sleeve, and made him take off his coat, *and the whole of his arm was one raw wound from the shoulder to the wrist.*'

'Oh, Mrs. Shorthouse! I shall faint!' cried Miss Harriet Press, hysterically.



‘It seems that he could not put on the sleeve-pieces of the armour, through not knowing how to rivet them, which accounts for it, I suppose. News was brought down that Miss Forde’s injuries were next to nothing, but, however, she was not allowed to go home that night. Her brother went home by himself, and he was to go up there this morning to hear how she is.’

‘I think the least we can do will be to call at Minstergate on our way home, to enquire for Miss Forde, Harriet,’ said Miss Press. ‘Her brother would have felt her death excessively.’

‘I always thought Leonora Forde a designing girl,’ remarked Mrs. Hancock, suddenly, ‘and now I am quite sure of it;’ and so had the narrative unhinged her that she opened her tea-pot and absently stirred up the tea-leaves with a spoon, a proceeding watched with horror by the ladies round.

‘You don’t surely think she set fire to herself on purpose?’ panted Miss Harriet.

‘How do I know? It would be all of a piece,’ was the snappish reply. ‘It won’t be her fault if she isn’t married. Men,’ with a stony eye on her meek and rosy son, ‘men are taken in with that sort of person; I’m not. It’s my belief that she all along meant to catch this Major Westmorland, and that is what makes her so free and independent with her betters;’ an angry flush on the matron’s cheek might have led a reader of character to guess that she had intended for Leo, if she had behaved herself, no less an honour than that of being her daughter-in-law. ‘Well! It will be a fine stroke of business for the doctor if his sister makes such a brilliant match; I only wish her husband joy of her, that’s all!’

‘But the poor young doctor will miss her,’ timidly suggested Miss Harriet.

‘Pooh!’ cried Mrs. Hancock, quite rudely.

‘I wonder,’ said Mrs. Shorthouse, suddenly struck with an idea, ‘if the Fordes will be at the dinner-party on Wednesday.’

‘Mark my words, they will!’ said Mrs. Hancock, with fearful energy. ‘Sayers! Don’t sit there blinking! Take Miss Press’s empty cup!’

Her son, who had been pensively staring out into the garden through his gold-rimmed spectacles, started violently and went, in a knock-kneed and submissive manner, to do her bidding.

‘Did not I tell you, the first day that young man arrived in Norchester, that I saw him alighting at the doctor’s door?’ went on the lady. ‘I thought that very day of what was going on, and you see I was right.’

‘I—I have not heard that they are engaged yet, not positively engaged,’ faintly

put in Mrs. Shorthouse. 'Mr. Clarke did not say that.'

'Perhaps you will hear it announced on Wednesday,' suggested Miss Harriet.

'It is as plain as the nose on my face,' said Mrs. Hancock, with conviction. 'The Saxons take no notice of the Fordes until the arrival of this young man; then at once they single them out. Mrs. Shorthouse and I, ourselves, saw young Westmorland introduce Leonora Forde to Tom Saxon, and anybody at Duffield might see that he played tennis with nobody but her. Well! some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouth.'

'Very true,' said Mr. Sayers Hancock, mournfully.

There was food for a great deal more talk before the party separated. Such a complete anecdote rarely fell in their way, poor souls, and they made the most of it. Tom Saxon always said it was the family

vocation to provide material for discussion in the neighbourhood, but even he little guessed how literally true this was. All other interests paled before this new one. Even the vagaries at the palace were forgotten. The rumours that the bishop's eldest daughter was to marry an actor, and that his eldest son was to become president of an agnostic association, were never so much as mentioned.

They sat on and talked, warmed through and through with the gratifying consciousness that they and their friends were the only really respectable people in Norchester.

'Well!' was Mrs. Hancock's parting word when at last her visitors took leave; 'if I had a daughter, she would have been very unlike Leonora Forde!'

There was no questioning the entire probability of such a statement, it bore the stamp of truth.

But when left alone with her son and heir, when she had re-arranged the tumbled antimacassars, and pushed the rug straight with her foot, her first remark sounded to the startled young man strangely irrelevant.

‘It has always been a marvel to me, Sayers, how it is that, living as you do in a gay place like Wokeford, you have never learned to play lawn-tennis!’

Mrs. Shorthouse, it being too late for the afternoon service at the cathedral, went her way up Minstergate towards the Berlin wool-shop, with intent to have a chat with the excellent Miss Gibson who kept it, and to regale her with the prevailing sensation. To her disappointment, Miss Gibson was quite *au fait* in the whole affair, for Mrs. Saxon had sent down the groom on the pony that morning, for cotton for dressing burns. Indeed, she was

able to supplement Mr. Clarke's version with one or two piquant particulars, such as that the Major owned to having had a bad night, and would be prevented from shooting that day, but that Miss Forde was quite well, and all the young ladies and gentlemen in merry spirits.

'The young are always thoughtless, mum,' said Miss Gibson, 'and she so near her death too, pretty dear!'

Returning from this visit, Mrs. Short-house was favoured with a real stroke of luck, for at the door of Dr. Forde's stood the Hesselburgh brougham, and Richard just helping his sister to alight.

There stood Leo, radiant and bright-eyed, nodding and smiling to the coachman in farewell.

'My dear,' said the canon's wife, hurrying up, 'I am very glad to see you so well after your terrible accident.'

'Oh, have you heard about it? How

funny!’ cried Leo, with a surprised laugh.

‘But it scarcely comes under your heading of a “terrible accident,” Mrs. Shorthouse, I think,’ said Dick, good-humouredly. ‘Leo’s dress caught fire, and was at once put out by the person nearest at the time, that’s all!’

‘My dear Dr. Forde, I am shocked to hear you underrate the mercies of Providence in this way. What would have happened had Major Westmorland not been near, or had he not been equal to the occasion? She would have burned to death!’

‘My dear Mrs. Shorthouse, no girl could burn to death in a room full of sane men who all had free access to her. No doubt, Westmorland’s promptness minimised the consequences, but I really think you exaggerate the danger.’

‘Oh, well,’ said the lady, determined to be amiable, ‘you doctors always make so



light of a thing! But your sister no doubt feels what an escape she has had.'

'Almost a complete escape,' replied Leo, with animation. 'Just a few blisters and one tiny raw place on my shoulder! Even less than Major Westmorland, who has really hurt his wrist. Oh, and a good piece of my hair was burnt off, but Dick says it saved my neck. It was all hanging down, you know!'

'She can afford to lose a bit! She is well supplied,' said Dick, fondly.

'And I suppose you are sorry to leave Hesselburgh?' said Mrs. Shorthouse, benignly.

The future Mrs. Westmorland was worth conciliating. She had heard her husband say there were fine livings in the Westmorland gift.

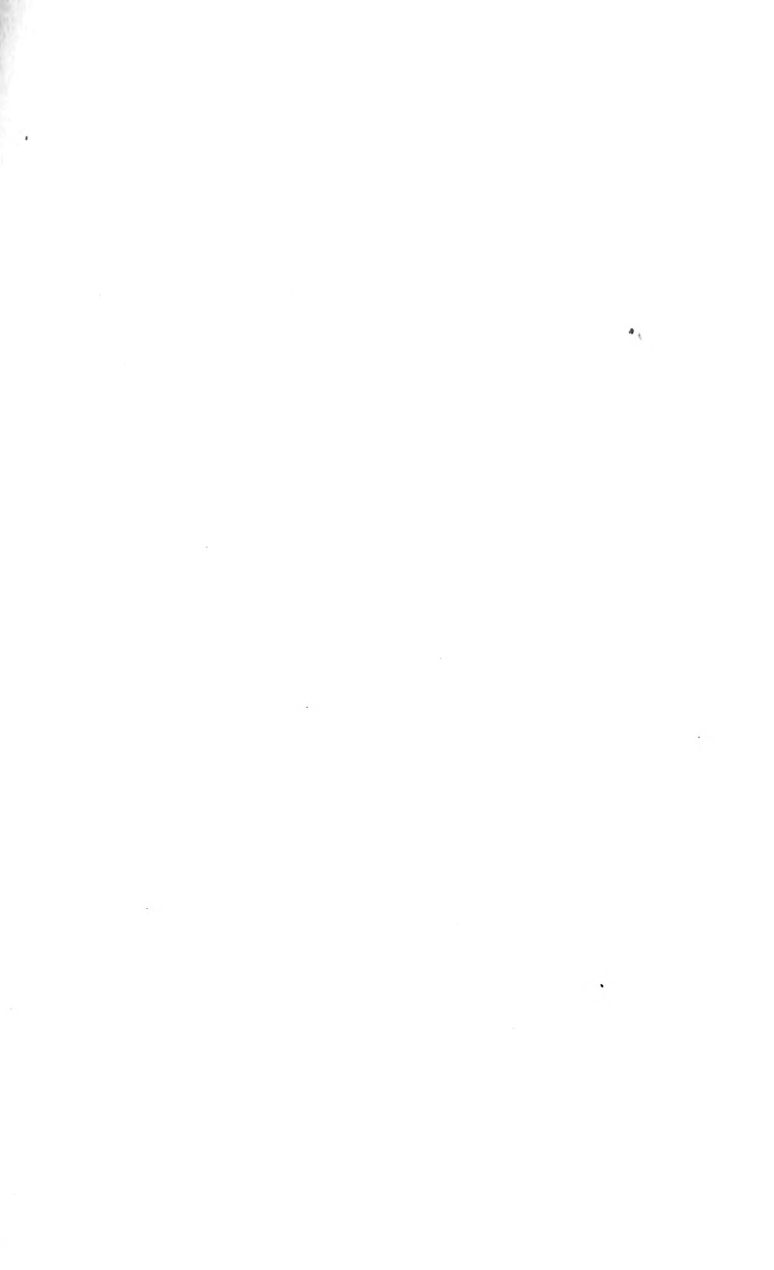
'Oh, very! But I shall see them again to-morrow,' said Leo, brightly.

‘Oh, indeed!’ replied her questioner, thinking of the marvellous astuteness of Mrs. Hancock. ‘And what did all you young folks do when you got together?’

Leo’s foot was on the threshold. Dick was hurrying her in. A mischievous smile dimpled her pretty mouth. She knew quite well that every word she let fall would go to Mrs. Hancock.

‘What did we do?’ cried she, ‘why, the very nicest thing I ever did in my life! The Saxons often do it! *We all went and had tea in the kitchen!* Good-bye, Mrs. Shorthouse!’

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.











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